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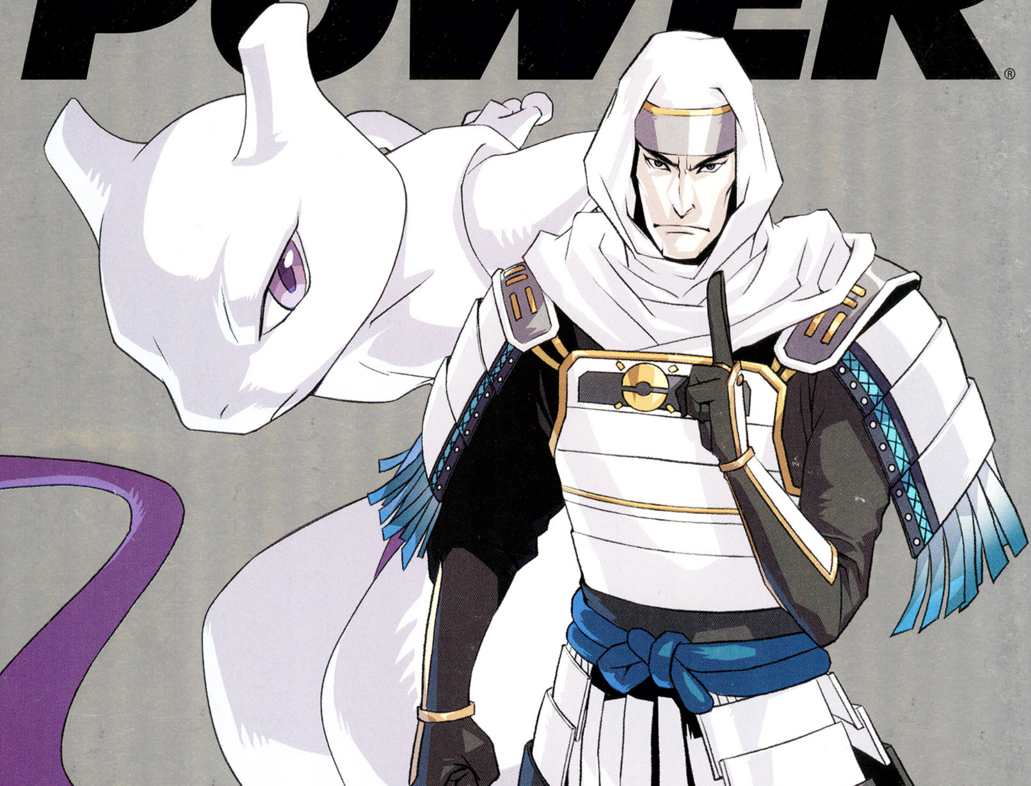

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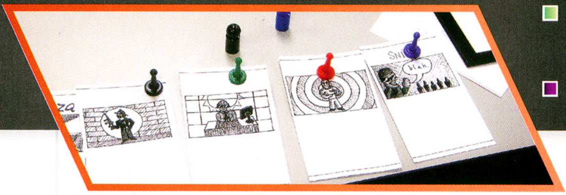

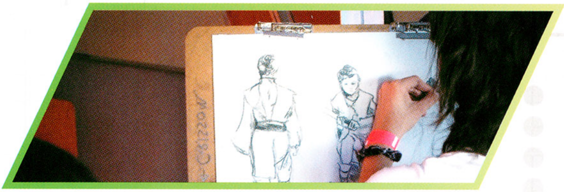

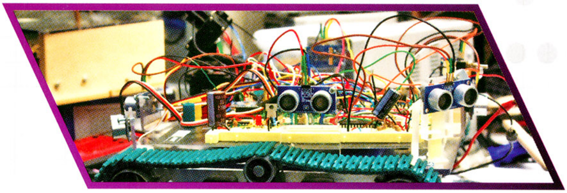

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The eagerly anticipated RPG from genre legend Hironobu Sakaguchi is finally coming to the US. We have all the details, including an interview with the man himself.

Ultimate Super Mario 60

We love all the Super Mario games, but which one is the best? It took some effort, but we were able to rank our favorites. What about best enemies, power-up, and bosses, though? Yeah, we figured those out, too.

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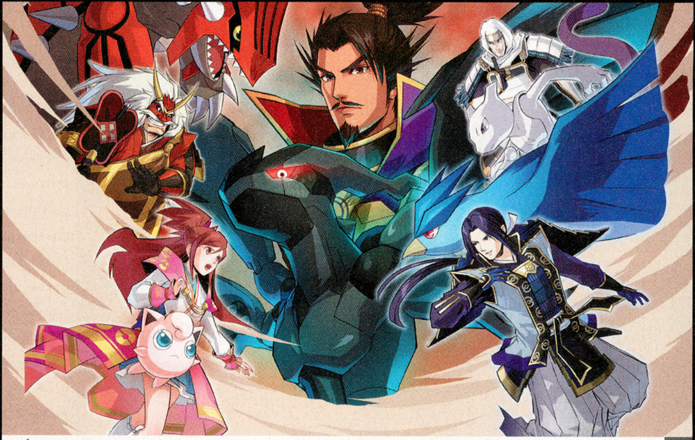

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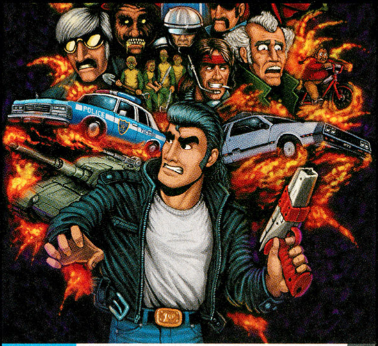

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N3DS = NINTENDO 3DS
SNES = SUPER NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
VC = VIRTUAL CONSOLE
Wii = Wii
Wii U = Wii U
WW = WiiWARE

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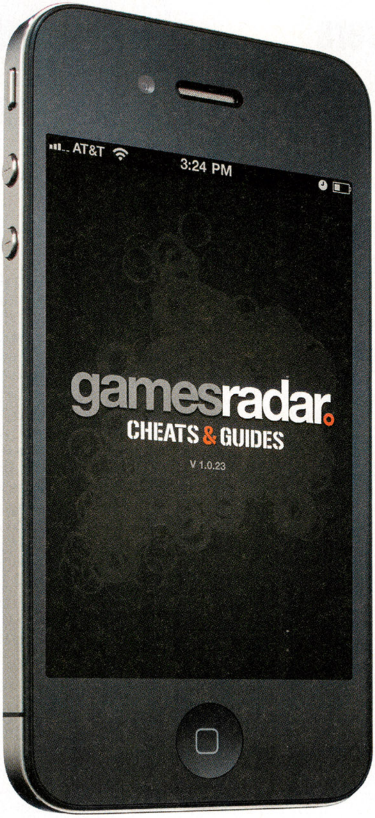

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Pulse

Calling All Crossovers

Chris Slate

Is there anything as cool as a crossover? It's the ultimate form of fan wish fulfillment, bringing together multiple franchises to celebrate what makes them each so great. The king of the video game crossover is, of course, the Super Smash Bros. series, particularly Super Smash Bros. Brawl (watching the intertwining stories of so many classic characters in Subspace Emissary mode was a Nintendo fan's dream come true). The top crossover publisher is clearly Capcom, whose franchise stars have fought not only with each other, but with characters from Marvel, Tekken, and Tatsunoko. But those matchups are fairly obvious, pitting action heroes against action heroes in action games. I especially enjoy the stranger combinations that clash genres as well as characters, such as this month's cover game, Pokémon Conquest. Not many would've thought to combine the world of Pokémon with a historical Japanese strategy series, but the results are awesome. I also expect great things from upcoming Nintendo 3DS titles Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance and Professor Layton vs. Ace Attorney, two multifranchise mash-ups that should deliver quality gameplay along with top-notch fan service. But I vote that we don't stop there—developers, keep giving us killer crossovers!

CHRIS SLATE **EDITOR IN CHIEF**

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This is The Hoff here, taking a break from piledriver practice to respond to your questions and comments. Plus, I've got a new special letter request: in celebration of this month's cover story on Pokémon Conquest (which combines Pokémon with Nobunaga's Ambition), what other unlikely video game mashups would you like to see? Send your responses to the address on page 6.

LETTERS

Mario Matrimony?

Mario is awesome, but I'm confused. Do Mario and Peach actually have a relationship? Because next thing you know they're going to get married. It would be a little strange to see a whole bunch of little Mario and Peach kids running and jumping around, but they do make a good couple. **—MATT P.**

Mario and Princess Peach's relationship is pretty well documented. They've shown public displays of affection on several occasions, and Peach was referred to as Mario's "special someone" in Super Mario Galaxy. Of course, Mario's quite the freewheeling type. He's been seeing Peach for more than 25 years now and hasn't tied the knot, so don't expect him to settle down anytime soon!

Think Pink

So I've been wondering this for a while: how the heck do you get pink puzzle pieces in StreetPass Mii Plaza's Puzzle Swap? **—JAWZ**

When you perform an update containing additional puzzles and a new piece is given out, there's a random chance it will be a pink one. But aside from that, the only way to get pink puzzle pieces is to obtain them via StreetPass. If you've been issued a pink piece, it's your duty to pass it along to other Nintendo 3DS owners!

V for Victory

I just read your 2011 Nintendo Power Awards, and I'd like to compliment you on choosing VVVVVV as Downloadable Game of the Year. It is a truly amazing title with innovative gameplay, tight controls, amazing retro graphics (not to mention the awesome stereoscopic 3D), and one of the best soundtracks I've ever heard in a game. Anyone who hasn't played it should really give it a try. **—PAPERLUIGI13**

Dueling Legends

Me and two friends of mine got into an argument the other day about which is better—The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time or The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword. I was for Skyward Sword, they were for Ocarina. This argument lasted for a whole hour (while we were supposed to be doing work in class) and still wasn't done. We both put up good points for each, but I wanna know, what's you stance on it? **—BURROBOT**

You may have noticed that in the 2011 Nintendo Power Awards, we picked The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword as Game of the Year over Ocarina of Time 3D. However, a lot of that had to do with how new and fresh Skyward Sword feels. I don't think we'll be able to say which game is truly best until some time has passed and we're able to look at both games with more perspective.

I practically squealed in excitement when I saw the cover story of your most recent volume. Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two looks like it is going to be absolutely amazing! Sign me up for a preorder! Or two or three, depending on how many friends I decide to force this game on! **—VISIBLECC1**

Double Feature

Mickey and Oswald return to save the day in not one but two Epic Mickey sequels!

Disney Epic Mickey: The Power of Two

Collection Agency

I've been collecting Pokémon cards for quite some time now and I've reached over 3,000 different cards (not counting doubles or triples). So, I was wondering if y'all have any cool video game-based collections. **—AWZWWDS**

As a matter of fact, Justin owns a large collection of video game action figures; Steve has a number of classic games signed by their creators; and I am in possession of a horde of brain-sucking parasites I found on planet SR388.

To Upgrade or Not to Upgrade

I own a Nintendo DS and I'm wondering if I should upgrade to a N3DS. After all, it has such amazing new games and features! However, I have a few GBA games, and if I get a N3DS, I won't be able to play them and would be forced to get rid of them. What should I do? Should I keep my DS and miss out on the great 3D titles, or should I upgrade and leave my GBA games behind forever? Or do you have a completely different answer? **—LILPIKACHU**

Who says you have to get rid of your Nintendo DS if you get a Nintendo 3DS? It might cost a bit more if you don't trade it in, but if you think you'll still use it, you might as well hold onto it!

Keep on Questing

I love Dragon Quest. I personally think that it is the most underrated series ever. There seriously needs to be a sequel to Dragon Quest IX. Maybe a DQX? Augh. I'm going to have to resort to playing lesser RPGs like Kingdom Hearts and Final Fantasy.... **—BALL HOG**

The good news is that Dragon Quest X has already been announced for Wii and Wii U in Japan. The other good news is that Final Fantasy and Kingdom Hearts are also awesome, so you should play them, too.

Missing Link

I've been searching for weeks and weeks but I seem to have completely misplaced my Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D game! I've looked everywhere: closet, under the bed, under my desk, on my desk, all the drawers in my dresser, dirty pants pockets, bathroom, under the sink, living room, kitchen, pantry, refrigerator, freezer, medicine cabinet, bookshelf, garage.... I just hope it'll turn up somewhere. **—GLITCHGADE**

Have you checked behind the waterfall? Sorry; I feel your pain, but I couldn't resist.

DON'T HASSLE THE HOFF

Hey, Hoff! I'm 10 years old and I'm making a second annual StreetPass event in my hometown in New Jersey. I was wondering if you had some ideas for how to make it awesome. **—HAPPYTGOOD**

The Hoff says: If you really want to put on an impressive shindig, you should probably hire some ninjas. Who doesn't love ninjas? Not only are they cool and acrobatic, but if anyone starts giving you trouble you'll know they've got your back (assuming no one offers them a better deal). But you know what would be even cooler than ninjas? Ninjas riding dinosaurs. You bring in some ninjas riding atop stegosaurs, and you've got yourself a party and a half. Of course, you'll need some great music, too. Presumably the dinosaur-riding ninjas will take up most of your budget, so you'll probably want to make sure they can play guitar. Or saxophone. Or possibly even banjo. Any of those will do. Also: Don't forget the ranch dressing.

We've Gotcha Covered

The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword is an awesome game, but why didn't you guys put it on an NP cover? You gave Ocarina of Time one but not Skyward Sword. Why? **—AWD**

Not only did we give The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword a cover—we actually gave it two! The first was back on Vol. 258, when we initially played the game; the second was on Vol. 274 (newsstand version only), when we ran the review. You're welcome.

NINTENDO 3DS
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FALL GAME GUIDE
TWO NEW POKÉMON GAMES
HE'S BACK!
DONKEY KONG COUNTRY RETURNS
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We test the revolutionary new controls of The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword for Wii
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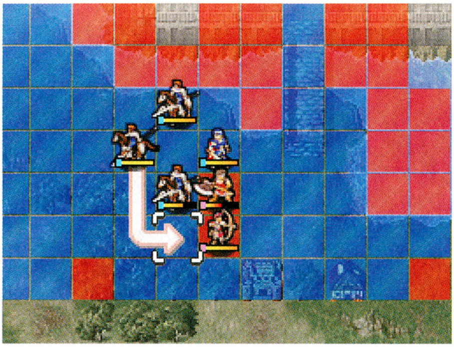
The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword Rated!
Future

I've had a couple of video game-inspired dreams, but the most notable was after playing Fire Emblem for eight hours. My dreams were all grid-based. —**STEVEN**



Have you ever had a dream about a video game?

I've had many video game-related dreams. There've been a few concerning my Animal Crossing town. There's been a couple related to The World Ends with You, which were just too complex to write about here. But the oddest, most awesome video game-inspired dream I've ever had has to be the one with me, my friends, and Doctor Who trying to stop Bowser and Bowser Jr. from taking over New York City. The Ghostbusters and Mr. Stay Puft even made a surprise appearance (they were trying to fight these weird bunny things). But the most awesome part? I high-fived the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man. —**BLU RAZZ**

So, I was Link and I used the dowsing ability from The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword, and I found Zelda in a wood cage. I freed her, and right when we were about to kiss, she punches me in the face! Hard! —**PREX123**

My video game-inspired dream came to me after playing Resident Evil 4. My house turned into a haunted mansion-esque environment, and there were monsters like the kinds you see in Resident Evil lurking everywhere! I had my trusty gun with me and even a knife like you use in Resident Evil 4. I even came across the merchant from the game! The whole experience was both scary and awesome, like the game my dream was based on. —**SIRICA**

Long ago, I dreamt of Wario and Waluigi doing the little "Hello my baby, hello my honey" deal. Is this a sign to make a Mario musical or something? —**LUIGILUNATIC**

I was watching Samus in the dream. She was running around in her Zero Suit and apparently trying to infiltrate some sort of government building. It was really weird watching Samus walk around on a carpeted floor and I remember thinking, "This is stupid." Weird, huh? —**H.T. THE SPACE WARRIOR**

In my dream, I was in a park or something, and Link died in a pit trap. This meant my friend had to go replace him, which for some reason also meant he had to intentionally fall into the same trap. But he said, "This time I'll use the power of a Bandinero to get out!" and I said, "That's brilliant!" I'm not sure why I'd say that, considering Bandinero is a Wario Land enemy that just walks straight forward. —**ALT**

One night I went to sleep after playing Ocarina of Time 3D. I was in a classroom with my classmates and then Link walked in. He said our lesson today would be on turning into wolves. I was one of the first people who could do it and I helped my friends with it too. It felt really natural. Weirdest thing though, I hadn't even played The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess! —**ANNIE THE MERMAID**

I may not have had any interesting dreams about actual video games, but I once dreamed that I was at Nintendo Power headquarters. Chris Hoffman showed off an impressive collection of reanimated dinosaur skeletons, there was a ninja hacking your competitors using a modded N3DS, and Justin Cheng stole my sandwich. Inevitably, though, it was realized that I didn't belong there, and I got kicked out. —**LEWANUT**

PLEASE WRITE US

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Understand that the magazine staff is separate from Nintendo; we don't make the games.

Don't send links to game coverage on the Web—trust us; we see it all.

Don't ask about the status of upcoming games, or whether certain games will be announced; if we have that info, we'll always tell you.

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WARLORDS OF RANSEI

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ISSN: 1041-9551

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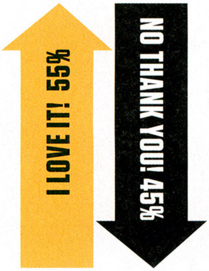

THE BEST SHOOTING GAMES ARE...

FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS	38%
CLASSIC 2D SHOOTERS	33%
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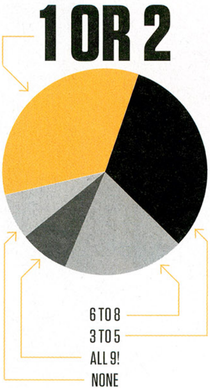
HOW MANY OF THE NINE CONSOLE MARIO PARTY GAMES HAVE YOU PLAYED?



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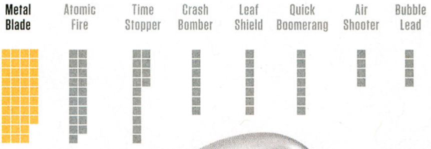
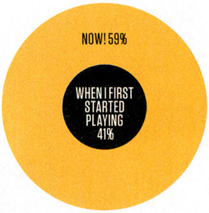


THE BEST NEW PLAYABLE CHARACTER IN MARIO KART 7 IS...

METAL MARIO

Metal Mario 46% • Lakitu 39% • Wiggler 11% • Honey Queen 4%

GAMES WERE BETTER...



DO YOU ALWAYS TRY TO EARN FIREWORKS AFTER A LEVEL IN SUPER MARIO BROS.?

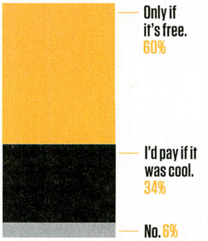
57%

No, it's not that important.

43%

Yes, every time.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN DOWNLOADING NEW PLAYABLE CHARACTERS IN YOUR FAVORITE FIGHTING GAME?



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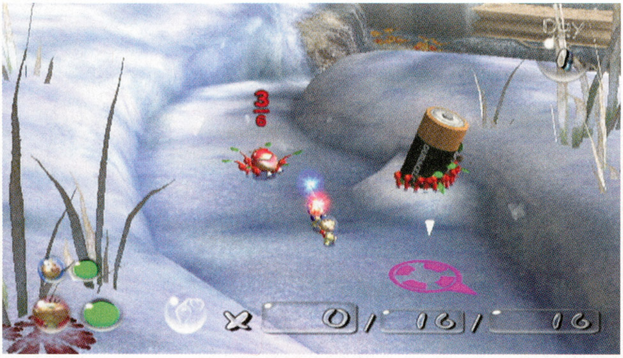


Seeds of Change

Nintendo's modern-day classic Pikmin 2 blooms again on Wii.

WHILE DEVELOPMENT continues on a brand-new Pikmin title for Wii U, Nintendo is looking to make the wait a bit more bearable with an enhanced port of the popular GameCube title Pikmin 2 . Much like 2009's New Play Control! Pikmin for Wii, this updated Pikmin 2 has been adapted to take advantage of the motion controls provided by the Wii Remote.

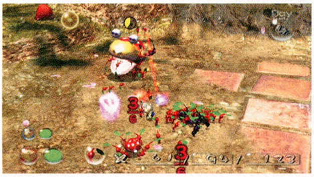
In Pikmin 2, you play the role of Captain Olimar, a diminutive spaceship captain who returns to his home planet of Hocotate only to find that his employer is going bankrupt. Olimar quickly discovers that a souvenir he brought back from the planet upon which he was stranded in the previous game (spoiler alert: it was Earth) is worth big bucks on his homeworld. Fearing the unemployment line, Olimar returns to the mysterious alien world to ransack treasures like bottle caps, batteries, and jars of Carmex.

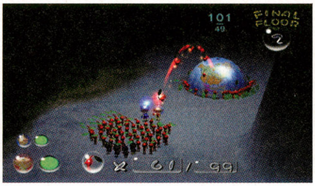
Olimar isn't alone in his search, though. Accompanying him on this mission is his coworker Louie, and when they arrive on Earth they enlist the help of the Pikmin. These tiny plant-like creatures follow Olimar around and can be directed to do a variety of tasks such as harvesting flowers to collect pellets (which spawn more Pikmin), destroying obstacles, fighting enemies, and yes, collecting treasures. You can have up to 100 Pikmin in your personal army, and mastering their use is essential, as they are the primary means by which you interact with the world.

You'll encounter five different varieties of Pikmin on your adventure. Three of them are holdovers from the first Pikmin game: Red ones are tough fighters and are resilient against fire. Yellow ones can be thrown higher than their counterparts, and electricity doesn't harm them. Pikmin typically perish in water, but the blue ones don't have that problem; they can even save other Pikmin who have wandered into a stream. The two types new to Pikmin 2 are purple and white. Purple are the strongest and heaviest of the lot. Tossing them at enemies stuns your foes momentarily. The (somewhat creepy) white variety is poisonous, making them harmful to enemies when they are eaten.

The Pikmin follow Olimar as he explores each level, and you guide their actions with simple controller commands. Herding the Pikmin is easier than ever thanks to the Wii Remote—you simply point to where you want to toss the Pikmin before you throw them into action. There's a sadistic thrill in watching your adorable horde swarm over a sleeping enemy, beat it to death, and then haul its corpse back to their ship.

Although the game's focus is on Captain Olimar's quest for trinkets, there's also a two-player battle mode that pits Olimar and Louie (and their respective Pikmin) against one another in a race to collect the most marbles. Pikmin 2 was very well-received when it was first released in 2004, and we're glad to see fans get the opportunity to experience it again with improved controls this June.—**PHIL T.**

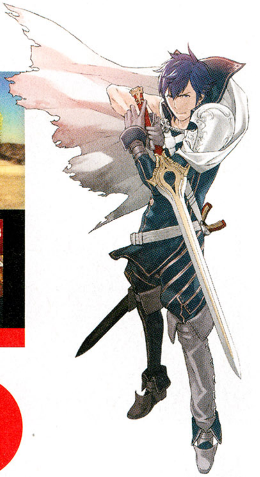




FIRE EMBLEM: AWAKENING

ロンクー
ペレジア兵
20
23
キルソード
鉄の斧
攻撃
命中
必殺

FIRE EMBLEM: AWAKENING



Role Reversal

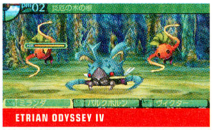
NEWS from JAPAN

After an action-packed winter for the Nintendo 3DS, spring and summer are bringing a bumper crop of RPGs.

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES tend to take a bit longer to develop than action games, so we haven't seen much of the genre on N3DS yet. But as the platform enters its second year, there are plenty of big RPGs on the horizon—in Japan, at least.

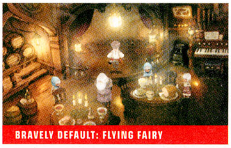
The fun begins with the April 19 release of Nintendo's own Fire Emblem: Awakening, the first original installment of the long-running strategy-RPG series to appear on a handheld since 2004's Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones. Awakening features several new mechanics that seem designed to make your army of heroes function as a group instead of as isolated individuals. For example, adjacent units can now team up, dishing out simultaneous attacks against a single foe, all but guaranteeing that he won't survive to counterattack. You can also combine two characters into a single unit that takes on the stronger stats of each member. For example, a slow heavy unit could hitch a ride on a Pegasus Knight to take advantage of its higher speed and mobility. Or a wounded unit could join with a healthy one to stay relevant in combat without risking an untimely death. The theme of teamwork continues with a Wi-Fi co-op multiplayer mode in which two players each contribute three characters and work together to battle an enemy army.

The next major RPG is Etrian Odyssey IV, a brand-new installment in Atlus's popular series of dungeon crawlers, due out on July 5. EOIV features—for the first time in the series—multiple side dungeons in addition to the traditional, massive world-tree dungeon at the heart of the game. These side dungeons are presumably unlocked by a hot-air-balloon-exploration mode that has been modeled after Etrian Odyssey III's sailing minigame. The dungeons will be smaller than the world tree, but packed with high-level challenges and unique gimmicks.



ETRIAN ODYSSEY IV

CRIMSON SHROUD

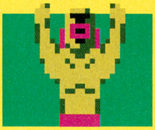


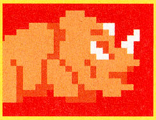
BRAVELY DEFAULT: FLYING FAIRY

Role-players will find a different sort of experience in Crimson Shroud, a game modeled after traditional table-talk RPGs like Dungeons & Dragons. Designed by Yasumi Matsuno, director of Final Fantasy XII and Tactics Ogre, Crimson Shroud is an interactive text- and picture-driven story with multiple paths and dice-driven combat. It's just one piece of Level-5's *Guild 01*, an omnibus release that includes three other games from notable industry figures and is due out on May 17.

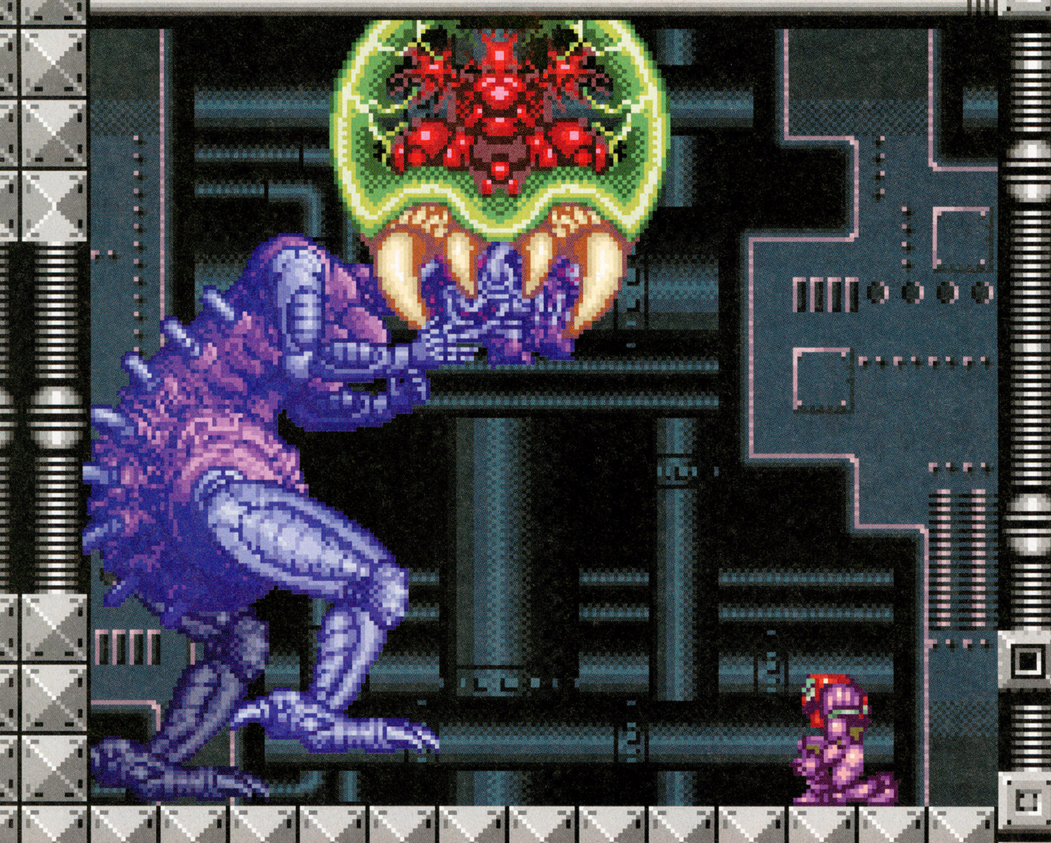
Finally, there's Bravely Default: Flying Fairy, a new Square Enix title seemingly modeled after Nintendo DS title Final Fantasy: 4 Heroes of Light. We don't yet have a release date for BD:FF, but Square Enix is promoting it heavily with a series of downloadable demos, each highlighting a different aspect of the game. The first demo introduced the game's unique style of AR Card-based storytelling, and while it didn't reveal much of the story, we have high expectations for the game's narrative—it's being written by Naotaka Hayashi, the writer of the mind-bending Steins;Gate visual novel and anime series. The second demo, featuring a town packed with side quests, was released at the end of March, and a demo introducing the combat system is expected soon. —**CASEY L.**

A WINNER IS...
Awesomely unexpected crossovers.





DODONGO DISLIKES...
The long, painful wait for E3.



THAT WAS AWESOME!

OUR FAVORITE VIDEO GAME MOMENTS

BABY SAVES THE DAY

SUPER METROID, SUPER NES, 1994

> "Who wasn't moved when Samus's adopted baby Metroid sacrificed itself while draining Mother Brain's energy and transferring it to our dying heroine? Even thinking about it now makes me all misty-eyed." —**PHIL T.**

Games Are Art

Still not convinced that video games can be art? The 80 titles showcased in a Smithsonian American Art Museum exhibit may sway you.

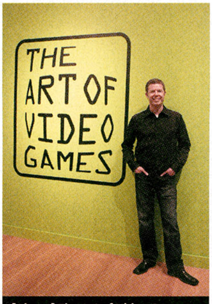
FORGET WHAT CROTCHETY film critics say—video games are unquestionably art. Over the past 40 years, gaming has proven time and time again that it's completely capable of telling wonderful, emotional stories, and interactive entertainment is now a major part of our culture. Among those acknowledging gaming's importance is the Smithsonian American Art Museum, which launched The Art of Video Games, an exhibit honoring gaming's crowning achievements. Through September 2012, 80 games spanning five eras will be on display in the renowned Washington, DC, museum.

Curator Chris Melissinos took care in choosing the perfect games to show at the exhibit, initially starting at 240 and then cutting the number down to a more manageable 80 via online voting. After all was said and done, 3.7 million votes from 175 countries were tallied, with hit Nintendo franchises like The Legend of Zelda and Super Mario Bros. coming out on top. The exhibit won't be locked in the past, though—it features more recent titles as well, including Metroid Prime 2: Echoes, Pikmin, and Star Fox: Assault, just to name a few.

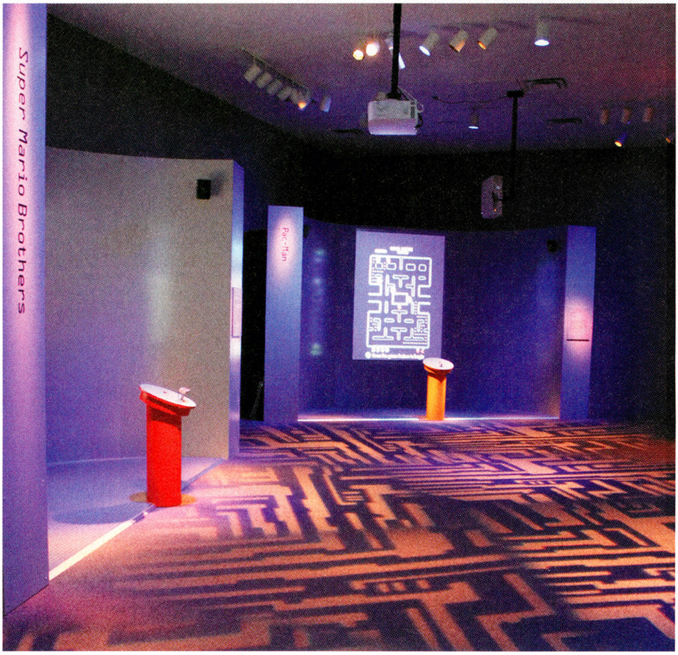
Washington DC isn't the exhibit's only stop, either. The show will hit the road after September, landing in the Boca Raton Museum of Art, Seattle's EMP Museum, Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, and the Flint Institute of Arts.

If you can't catch the traveling exhibit there's one other option: just pick up the book. *The Art of Video Games: From Pac-Man to Mass Effect* was released alongside the exhibit's debut, and features images and write-ups for all 80 games on display. The book, which begins with a foreword written by Elizabeth Broun, one of the directors at the Smithsonian Art Museum, shows the slow, momentous evolution of the medium through the years and presents wonderful high-resolution images of every selected game. Even releases such as Star Fox, which look dated when considered next to modern games, are given brilliant graphical treatments to honor their importance. Each game description not only gives background information, but explains why the game was chosen for inclusion in the collection. The book is also jam-packed with interviews in which various game-industry professionals share their opinions on the history of gaming. *The Art of Video Games: From Pac-Man to Mass Effect* is the perfect coffee-table book, adding an air of refinement to any home by taking gaming out of the entertainment center and putting it on display for what it truly is: art.

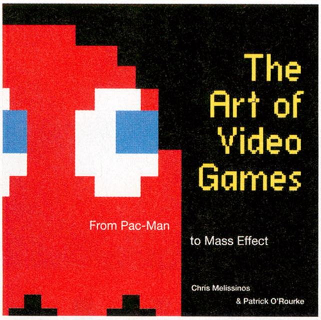
The last few years have been good to gaming, and we're happy to see it finally get the recognition it deserves. There's a Wii console in the White House, an exhibit in the Smithsonian—what's next? We can't wait to find out. —**HOLLANDER C.**



[Above] The Art of Video Games curator Chris Melissinos.



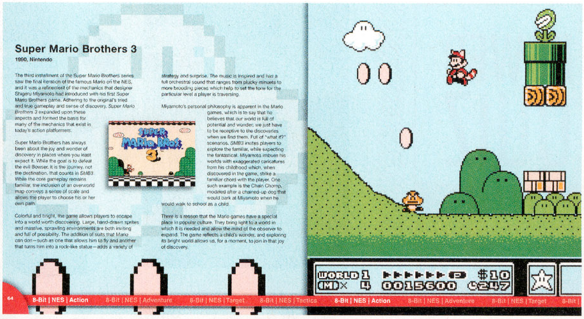
PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM



The Art of Video Games

From Pac-Man to Mass Effect

Chris Melissinos & Patrick O'Rourke



Super Mario Brothers 3

1990, Nintendo

The third installment of the Super Mario Brothers series saw the final iteration of the famous Mario on the NES, and it was a refinement of the mechanics that designer Shigeru Miyamoto had introduced with his first Super Mario Brothers game. Adhering to the original's tried and true gameplay and sense of discovery, *Super Mario Brothers 3* expanded upon these aspects and formed the basis for many of the mechanics that exist in today's action platformers.

Super Mario Brothers has always been about the joy and wonder of discovery in places where you least expect it. While the goal is to defeat the evil Bowser, it is the journey, not the destination, that counts in *SMB3*. While the core gameplay remains familiar, the inclusion of an overworld map conveys a sense of scale and allows the player to choose his or her own path.

Colorful and bright, the game allows players to escape into a world worth discovering. Large, hand-drawn sprites and massive, sprawling environments are both inviting and full of possibility. The addition of suits that Mario can don—such as one that allows him to fly and another that turns him into a rock-like statue—adds a variety of strategy and surprise. The music is inspired and has a full orchestral sound that ranges from plucky minuets to more brooding pieces which help to set the tone for the particular level a player is traversing.

Miyamoto's personal philosophy is apparent in the Mario games, which is to say that he believes that our world is full of potential and wonder; we just have to be receptive to the discoveries when we find them. Full of "what if?" scenarios, *SMB3* invites players to explore the familiar, while expecting the fantastical. Miyamoto imbues his worlds with exaggerated caricatures from his childhood which, when discovered in the game, strike a familiar chord with the player. One such example is the Chain Chomp, modeled after a chained-up dog that would bark at Miyamoto when he would walk to school as a child.

There is a reason that the Mario games have a special place in popular culture. They bring light to a world in which it is needed and allow the mind of the observer to expand. The game reflects a child's wonder, and exploring its bright world allows us, for a moment, to join in that joy of discovery.

SUPER MARIO BROS. 3
WORLD 1
M × 4
0015600
$10
247
64
8-Bit | NES | Action
8-Bit | NES | Adventure
8-Bit | NES | Target
8-Bit | NES | Tactics
8-Bit | NES | Action
8-Bit | NES | Adventure
8-Bit | NES | Target

The Legend of Zelda

1987, Nintendo

Much of the inspiration for the *The Legend of Zelda* stems from designer Shigeru Miyamoto's childhood. Specifically, he would explore caves, forests, lakes, and villages near his childhood home in Sonobe, Japan. A particularly delightful surprise occurred when Miyamoto found a hidden entrance to a cave in the middle of the woods and, after building his courage, explored it with the help of a lantern.

These experiences are mirrored in the gameplay that embodies *The Legend of Zelda*, and Miyamoto's design principle of building a believable environment where things are not always what they seem. The core elements of the action-adventure genre find their foundation in this game. Similarly, the fictional land of Hyrule, its backstory, and its rich history have been further explored and refined over the course of the many games in the series that followed.

The first massive exploration adventure for the Nintendo Entertainment System, the player controls the hero Link as he sets out to save Princess Zelda—named after F. Scott Fitzgerald's wife—from the clutches of an evil wizard, Ganon, who is seeking the mystical Triforce of Wisdom. It is up to the player to save Zelda, recover the Triforce, and free the land of Hyrule from Ganon.

Miyamoto's intent was to create a world that players would inhabit as a "miniature garden that they can put inside their drawer." Designed as a coming-of-age story, with the childlike Link gradually developing strength and courage in order to ultimately overcome evil, the game borrows from Japanese folklore (as well as some nods to J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*) to resemble a fantasy that children playing the game for the first time could readily identify with.

-LIFE-
58
8-Bit | NES | Action
8-Bit | NES | Adventure
8-Bit | NES | Target
8-Bit | NES | Tactics
8-Bit | NES | Action
8-Bit | NES | Adventure
8-Bit | NES | Target
8-Bit | NES
59

Super Mario Galaxy 2

2010, Nintendo

Super Mario Galaxy 2 follows a familiar plot: Mario's nemesis, Bowser, has once again kidnapped Princess Peach and it's up to Mario to rescue her. It is the simplest of motivators, but the story is incidental to the experience. The real substance of the game comes in the joy and wonderment of exploring the worlds laid out by designer Shigeru Miyamoto and his team.

Building on the formula set by *Super Mario Galaxy*, the sequel implements the same planet-traversing mechanic and side-scrolling 2D levels, but includes new power ups that add gameplay techniques to Mario's repertoire; it also reintroduces Yoshi, Mario's dinosaur companion, into the series. *Super Mario Galaxy 2* stands as the distillation of the best gameplay mechanics of all previous Mario games and wraps them in a luminous, candy-colored world that is both wondrous and instantly accessible.

Akin to an interactive diorama, the game effectively communicates the sense of scale in Mario's world. From the opening scenes where a towering Bowser kidnaps Princess Peach to the varied planets Mario explores, nothing feels out of place. The art direction sees a refinement of the iconic characters, the environments radiate magically rendered details from lighting to architecture, and the puzzles and obstacles are intuitive but challenging. The result is one of the most critically acclaimed Mario games of all time.

Where many games pull reflection from society, politics, or ethics, Miyamoto's central design philosophy is to observe the world—to look for the hidden in the obvious, to seek adventure, and to smile. *Super Mario Galaxy 2* has no overarching message; rather, it pulls from the heart of the inner child and allows the player to be free to explore fantastical worlds, to delight in discovery, and, quite simply, to feel happy while visiting Mario's world.

SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2
Press and
×14
3
×336
×199
×4
×61
190
Next Generation | Wii | Action
Next Generation | Wii | Adventure
Next Generation | Wii | Target
Next Generation | Wii | Tactics
Next Generation | Wii | Action
Next Gener
191

FROM THE ART OF VIDEO GAMES: FROM PAC-MAN TO MASS EFFECT, BY CHRIS MELISSINOS AND PATRICK O'ROURKE.
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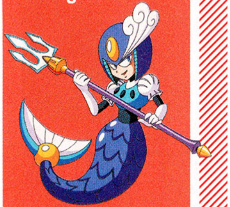
POWER QUIZ

EASY

In the Mega Man series, who is Mega Man's "sister"?

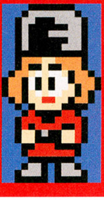
AVERAGE

Splash Woman, the only female Robot Master, appeared in which Mega Man game?



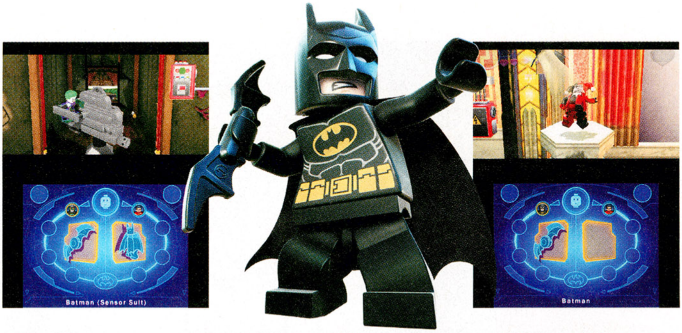
HARDCORE

What is the name of Dr. Cossack's daughter in Mega Man 4?



ANSWERS

EASY: Roll; AVERAGE: Mega Man 9; HARDCORE: Kalinka

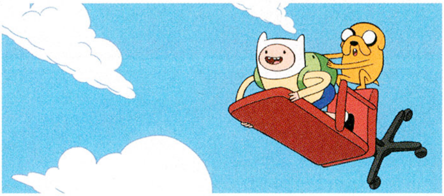


The Brick Knight

Fight for truth and justice when **LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes** comes to Nintendo 3DS.

THOUGH THE GAME was announced months ago, WB has finally pulled back the curtain on the upcoming LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes. This latest entry in the popular LEGO video game series places Gotham City in peril when several supervillains team up to take over the metropolis. Only the combined efforts of Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, The Flash, and others can save the day. In all, there are 50 DC Comics characters to unlock, each with unique superpowers. A character-customization mode also allows you to make your own heroes.

Perhaps the game's most interesting feature is that for the first time, the LEGO characters will actually speak. A trailer features narration by Lex Luthor, as portrayed by actor Clancy Brown (who provided the villain's voice in the *Justice League* animated series). We look forward to hearing from all our DC favorites when LEGO Batman 2 arrives on N3DS this summer. —**PHIL T.**



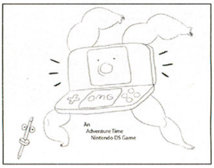
Mathematical!

C'mon, grab your friends. Cartoon Network's **Adventure Time** is coming to Nintendo DS.

WHAT TIME IS IT? It will soon be Adventure Time on your Nintendo DS handheld, according to recent Twitter messages by the hit TV show's creator, Pendleton Ward. In a series of sketches posted online, Ward revealed that he will be working closely with WayForward (the creators of Shantae, Mighty Switch Force!, and many other titles) to create a game that chronicles the adventures of Jake the dog and Finn the human. Specific details are scarce so far, but the idea of Adventure Time's charming weirdness mixed with WayForward's fantastic animation and solid platforming already has us excited.

Of course, we have no idea what type of game this will be. Ward's Twitter posts have mentioned only hypothetical ideas, including notes hinting at an Animal Crossing/tower defense hybrid and gameplay inspired by titles like Monster Hunter, Shadow of the Colossus, and Katamari Damacy. Will any of these concepts make it into the final game? Only time will tell.

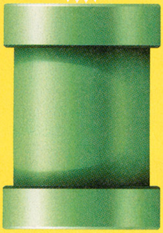
No publisher has yet been announced, but we'll be sure to keep you updated on Adventure Time as it comes closer to release. We are, after all, invested in this very cute video game. —**PHIL T.**

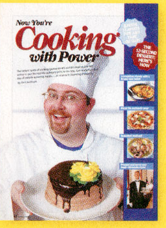


WARP ZONE

What we were writing about way back when

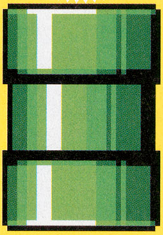
5 YEARS AGO




Now You're
Cooking
with Power

With an in-depth behind-the-scenes interview and two collectible covers (featuring Dialga and Palkia), the May 2007 issue of Nintendo Power was bursting with Pokémon Diamond and Pearl Version goodness. For some, however, the most delectable part of the issue was a food-game-based article titled Now You're Cooking with Power, in which NP editor Chris Hoffman faced numerous culinary disasters, including a battle with an octopus and a severe mishap with a chef's knife.

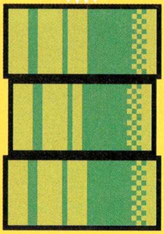
10 YEARS AGO



Spider-Man was the hottest summer movie of 2002, so it's no surprise that Activision prepared a video game adaptation to go with it. In Nintendo Power's exclusive look at the GameCube version of the title, players got to learn what it was like to suit up in the iconic red-and-blue attire and zip across the New York skyline. Also featured was the first game in the crash-centric Burnout racing series; we certainly wouldn't mind seeing that franchise revived on Nintendo 3DS or Wii U.

NINTENDO POWER
SPIDER-MAN

20 YEARS AGO



Although Darkwing Duck was on the cover of Nintendo Power Vol. 36, the most noteworthy game featured in the issue was Konami's Contra III: The Alien Wars for the Super NES. With two-player co-op action and six lengthy stages of nonstop shooting, Contra III was one of the most intense games of its day. The magazine also contained the results of the 1991 Nintendo Power Awards; the Overall Best Game honors went to Battletoads on NES, Metroid II: Return of Samus on Game Boy, and Super Mario World on Super NES.

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STAR POWER

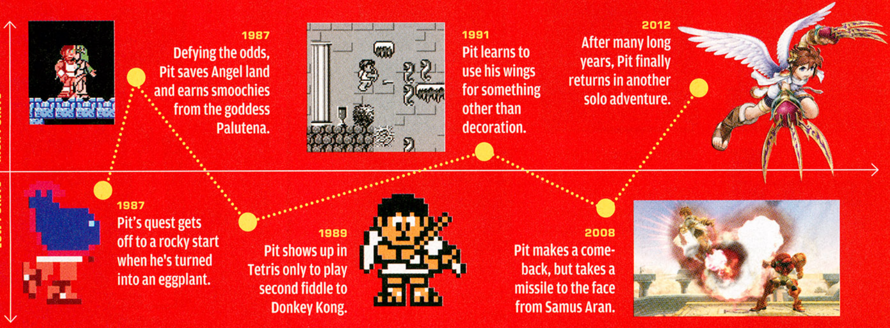
A closer look at the characters we love

Pit

FIRST APPEARANCE:
KID ICARUS
NES, 1987

You can't keep a good angel down. The once-forgotten winged wonder has proven that he's a top-tier hero.

CAREER GRAPH



1987
Defying the odds, Pit saves Angel land and earns smoochies from the goddess Palutena.

1987
Pit's quest gets off to a rocky start when he's turned into an eggplant.

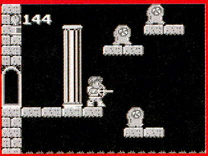
1989
Pit shows up in Tetris only to play second fiddle to Donkey Kong.

1991
Pit learns to use his wings for something other than decoration.

2008
Pit makes a comeback, but takes a missile to the face from Samus Aran.

2012
After many long years, Pit finally returns in another solo adventure.

OUR FAVORITE PIT GAMES



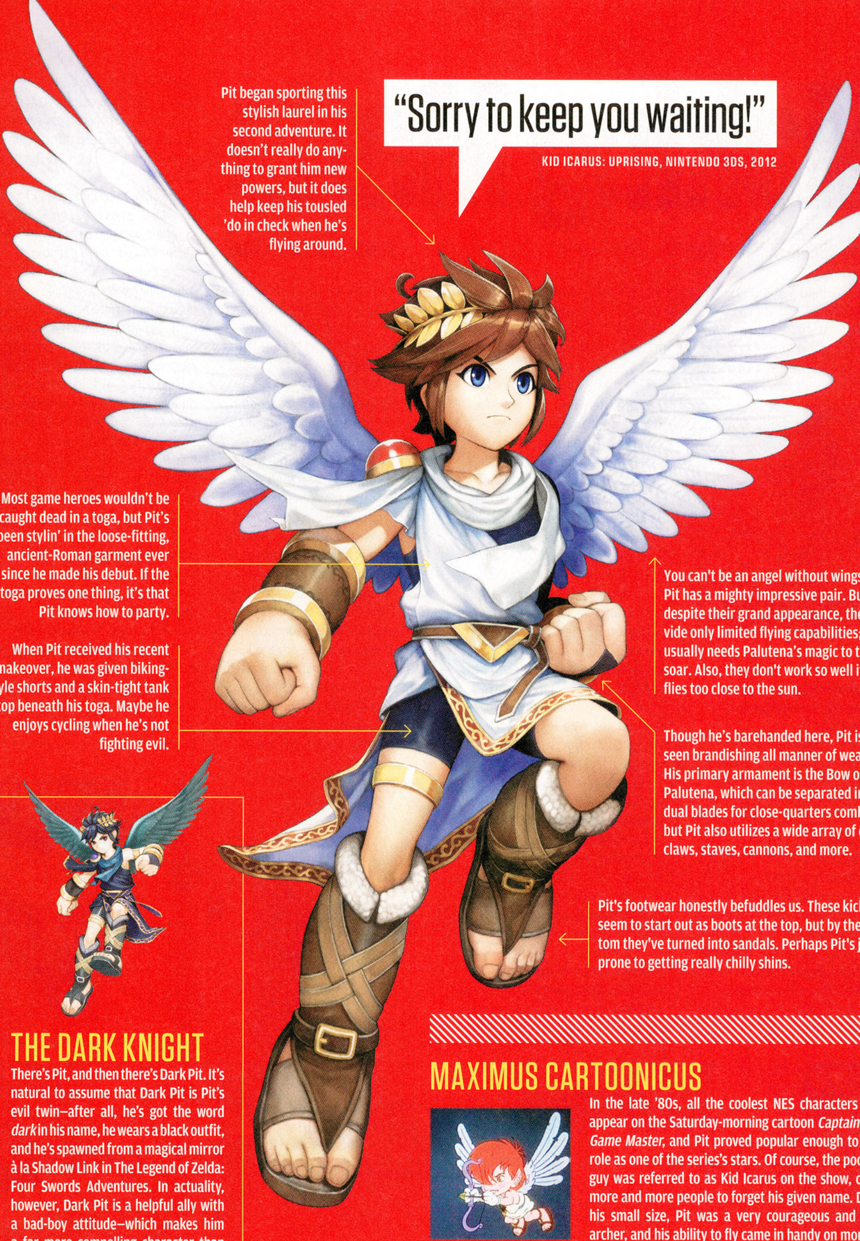
Kid Icarus: Of Myths and Monsters
GAME BOY, 1991
Pit battled against the demon Orcos in this followup to the original Kid Icarus. The gameplay was largely the same as that of its predecessor, but this time Pit was able to float using his wings, and he could freely explore each stage—falling off the bottom of the screen no longer killed him!

Super Smash Bros. Brawl
Wii, 2008
Pit made his long-awaited return to video gaming in Super Smash Bros. Brawl, allowing the hero to strut his stuff alongside the likes of Link and Mario in chaotic multiplayer action. Armed with his Bow of Palutena, Pit boasted a new look and a new attitude, both of which carried over into Kid Icarus: Uprising.

3D Classics: Kid Icarus
NINTENDO 3DS, 2012
The only reason that the groundbreaking original Kid Icarus isn't listed as a favorite is because of this recently released 3D-enhanced remake. It has the same challenging gameplay and content as the NES game, but it boasts upgraded graphics and other improvements.

Kid Icarus: Uprising
NINTENDO 3DS, 2012
Completely reinvented for a new generation, Kid Icarus: Uprising lets Pit fight on land and in the skies as he once again battles Medusa and the forces of the Underworld. Unlike in his previous exploits, however, Pit is well aware that he's in a video game, leading to some genuinely funny dialogue.

> “Sorry to keep you waiting!”
>
> KID ICARUS: UPRISING, NINTENDO 3DS, 2012



Pit began sporting this stylish laurel in his second adventure. It doesn’t really do anything to grant him new powers, but it does help keep his tousled ’do in check when he’s flying around.

Most game heroes wouldn’t be caught dead in a toga, but Pit’s been stylin’ in the loose-fitting, ancient-Roman garment ever since he made his debut. If the toga proves one thing, it’s that Pit knows how to party.

When Pit received his recent makeover, he was given biking-style shorts and a skin-tight tank top beneath his toga. Maybe he enjoys cycling when he’s not fighting evil.

You can't be an angel without wings, and Pit has a mighty impressive pair. But despite their grand appearance, they provide only limited flying capabilities; Pit usually needs Palutena’s magic to truly soar. Also, they don't work so well if he flies too close to the sun.

Though he’s barehanded here, Pit is often seen brandishing all manner of weapons. His primary armament is the Bow of Palutena, which can be separated into dual blades for close-quarters combat, but Pit also utilizes a wide array of clubs, claws, staves, cannons, and more.

Pit's footwear honestly befuddles us. These kicks seem to start out as boots at the top, but by the bottom they've turned into sandals. Perhaps Pit's just prone to getting really chilly shins.

THE DARK KNIGHT

There’s Pit, and then there’s Dark Pit. It’s natural to assume that Dark Pit is Pit’s evil twin—after all, he’s got the word *dark* in his name, he wears a black outfit, and he’s spawned from a magical mirror à la Shadow Link in The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures. In actuality, however, Dark Pit is a helpful ally with a bad-boy attitude—which makes him a far more compelling character than the various doppelgangers that came before him.

MAXIMUS CARTOONICUS

In the late ’80s, all the coolest NES characters got to appear on the Saturday-morning cartoon *Captain N: The Game Master*, and Pit proved popular enough to land a role as one of the series’s stars. Of course, the poor little guy was referred to as Kid Icarus on the show, causing more and more people to forget his given name. Despite his small size, Pit was a very courageous and skilled archer, and his ability to fly came in handy on more than one occasion. Sadly, his usefulness was offset by his incredibly annoying habit of tacking “-icus” onto the end of random words when he spoke. As you can imagine, people got sickicus of this pretty darn quickicus.

Making Mario

We talk capes, boss battles, and trade secrets with the director of **Super Mario 3D Land.**

Mario titles always rank among the best reasons to own a Nintendo platform, and Super Mario 3D Land is certainly no exception when it comes to the Nintendo 3DS. Koichi Hayashida served as director on the mustachioed plumber's latest triumph—and before that on Super Mario Galaxy 2. To discuss what goes into a platforming masterpiece, we caught up with Hayashida following his recent presentation at the Game Developers Conference. **—STEVE T.**

NINTENDO POWER How does stereoscopic 3D affect your approach to level design in a Mario game?

KOICHI HAYASHIDA We did a lot of different experiments with the stereoscopic view to see what would work and what wouldn't. For instance, we would play through some levels of Super Mario 64—like Whomp's Fortress—in stereoscopic 3D just to see how it would work. And from that we did learn quite a bit about the merits and demerits of that kind of view.

So for example, as you're moving around the game world in a stereoscopic view, if a coin or a block or something in midair comes between the camera and Mario, it creates what we call a "stereo-window violation." That's kind of an uncomfortable experience for the player.

But we also hit upon a number of interesting merits for using the stereoscopic view; that is, places in which it's a little more advantageous to have that view. One of those would be, for example, going down stairs. If you don't have a stereoscopic view, that image looks a little bit flat and you don't have that sense of depth as you go down. But when you turn on the stereoscopic view, it's very effective. You have a much more visceral feel of it. Similarly, if you're jumping down into a very deep pit, there's a very interesting stereoscopic effect as well. You get that good feeling of depth.

So we wanted to play up all of the merits and minimize the demerits within the game structure. We found lots of different places we could make adjustments to make that possible. For example, Bowser throwing fireballs at you is really cool because we have the opportunity to have them popping out of the screen.

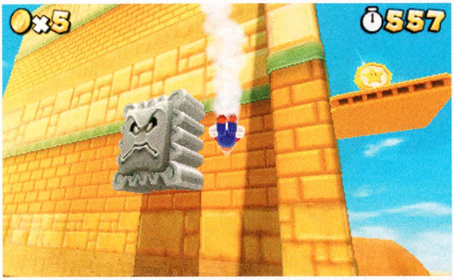
You've worked on Mario titles for both home consoles and handheld systems. Putting aside hardware-specific features, how should handheld Mario be approached differently from console Mario?

I guess there are two things to consider. The first is that—and this might be a Japan-only consideration—you have a lot of people who commute on the train to and from work or school. A lot of those people play games while they're on the train. So I thought it would be good to have each level be about as long as it takes for someone to get to his or her station. If you're making lots of different connections on the train or subway, each one might take, say, ten minutes. I wanted the game experience for a single level to fit inside those ten minutes. Now, if you're talking about a console game like Super Mario Galaxy, you might have to spend 20 or even 30 minutes to finish some stages, especially if you're trying to collect every single purple coin. So we had to make our level design quite a bit more compact for that reason.

The other thing that we took into consideration when designing specifically for a portable is the StreetPass functionality of the Nintendo 3DS. That got us thinking, "Well, this is something a console can't do, so we need to find an interesting way to use it." It opened up quite a few new possibilities. One of those is exchanging mystery boxes in the Toad houses as you StreetPass with another person. Another is trading your clear time for a level. You can see if someone you don't even know has been able to beat this level in a certain time and it motivates you to try to beat that time. A lot of people on our team especially liked that feature.

Why did you decide to include a run button rather than rely on the analog functionality of the Circle Pad?

One of the things about the Circle Pad is that you don't have quite as much sensory feedback about how far you're pushing it. You only know that you're pushing it at all or that maybe you're pushing it to the edge. But we have these four buttons to



work with on the other side of the device, and there's something about that traditional feel of holding down the dash button in a Mario game that I really enjoy. All of that made this a very easy decision.

As for why Mario needs to dash at all, I guess that goes back to everyone's desire when they play a Mario game to finish a stage quickly. There's a sense of accomplishment that comes with that. But if beginning players were to try that, they would probably just fall into pits a lot. [Laughs] So we need to give them the ability to go slowly while allowing advanced players to challenge themselves with a speed run of a given level. I think that reasoning probably dates back to the original Super Mario Bros.

Now, in Super Mario Galaxy I don't know that we had quite as many opportunities to distinguish where people should be dashing or not. So with Super Mario 3D Land, I was also interested in going back to a very clear delineation between a full run and a walk.

Aside from the Tanooki Suit, did you consider bringing back any other suits from Super Mario Bros. 3?

Well, let me explain why we decided to use the Tanooki Suit in the game. I think it's just one of those jump-delay or slow-fall mechanics that we introduce to balance out the difficulty of gameplay. So in Super Mario Sunshine, for example, you were able to hover with FLUDD to delay landing after a jump. In Super Mario Galaxy you had the spin in midair, and in Super Mario Galaxy 2 you had Yoshi's flutter kick. So each game has introduced a new jump-delay mechanic. Whenever we're trying to think of what form that mechanic is going to take in a new game, we always have a choice of different expressions for that idea. This time around, there was a little bit of a debate as to whether to use the Tanooki Suit from Super Mario Bros. 3 or the cape from Super Mario World. I have to say that I personally preferred the cape, but I was overruled by Mr. Miyamoto. [Laughs]

What was the origin of the new Boomerang Suit?

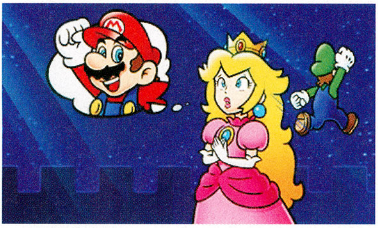
We knew that we wanted to include one more transformation for Mario, but it was sort of getting late in the development process and we didn't have much time left to implement it. So we thought about the fact that one of the bosses, Pom Pom, has a boomerang and we figured we could use that. Also, the Boomerang Bros. had been around and using boomerangs for a while. We thought that after seeing that, maybe players would like to try throwing a boomerang themselves. So we did a few tests and they seemed to work pretty well. At that point, we simply had to decide what the actual suit was going to look like—what's the expression of that idea in graphic terms. When we looked back at Super Mario Bros. 3, which had the Hammer Suit, we thought, "OK, that's pretty easy. Maybe we'll do the same thing with the Boomerang Suit and give it the same appearance as the enemy with that ability."

The difficulty in Super Mario 3D Land ramps up much more gradually than in previous Mario titles. What was the thinking behind that?

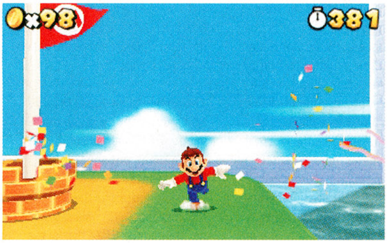
We wanted to design the game such that lots of people could see the normal ending. That's part of the design philosophy of making games for everyone from ages 5 to 95. In the case of people who had never played a Mario game before, we wanted to make sure that they had an enjoyable

Classified Information

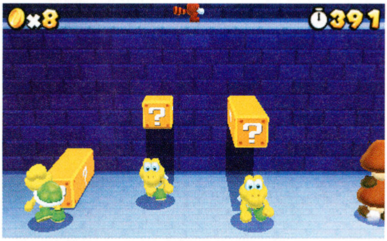
Have you discovered these Super Mario 3D Land secrets yet?



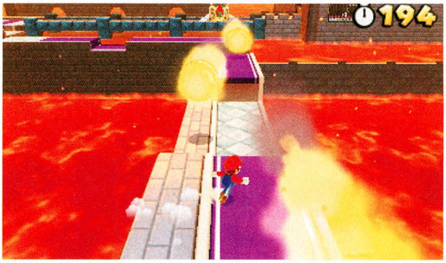
MOVING POSTCARDS
While viewing one of the postcards that you receive for completing each world, you can shake the Nintendo 3DS system to make the illustration move and activate other little Easter eggs (such as making Luigi appear in the scene above if you shake the system up and down).



HAT TRICK
If you reach the maximum number of lives (1,110), small Mario will start wearing a hat and Super Mario will lose his.



WARP ZONE
Soon after you reach the checkpoint flag in World 1-2, you'll come to some Coin Blocks (see above). Jump onto one of the higher blocks, then jump again and press up on the Circle Pad to reach a hidden ledge. If you keep following the ledge to the right, you'll eventually come to an orange pipe that transports you immediately to World 2.



experience because this could be the entry point to the 3D Mario games for them. So the learning curve is gradual. But if advanced players are finding the early levels to not be enough of a challenge, they can try to collect all of the Star Medals. And then they have the special worlds to look forward to. I think it basically comes down to how we make this game fun for everyone. The answer to that is giving it a very gradual difficulty curve.

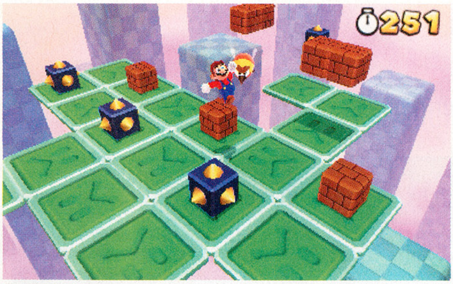
It seems that the Mario games always try to offer some surprise with the final boss fights. How do you go about topping yourselves and coming up with something that will surprise even veteran players?
I have to say, it's always a challenge. Part of it is just that designing boss fights is really hard! [Laughs] You have to spend so much time working on those in order to find some kind of new gameplay to bring to it and make it compelling. The last boss fight in Super Mario 3D Land was certainly no exception. The only thing I can say to help someone in the process of trying to find that challenge for longtime players is you have to just keep thinking and keep thinking until you find it.

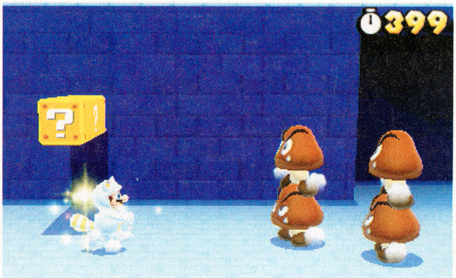
In general, what is the hardest thing about working on a Mario game?
I guess the first thing that comes to mind is that you have very high expectations from players. But that's a good challenge for any developer to have.

I was the director on Super Mario Galaxy 2 as well as on Super Mario 3D Land. And I have to say, between those two projects, development on Super Mario Galaxy 2 was probably more challenging. The reason for that is that with every Mario game, we take a look at what unique capabilities a new piece of hardware offers us. Those are what drive us to create new gameplay possibilities for a Mario game. But in a situation like Super Mario Galaxy 2, where you're releasing the second Mario platforming game on a system, you don't have the possibilities of new hardware driving you in quite the same way.

Over the course of this game's development, were there any suits with which the team experimented but ultimately ended up rejecting?
Aside from the cape from Super Mario World, there was also a certain version of the Tanooki Suit that was cut. We had been considering just the tail and ears, as well as the full suit. But there was one more version that we considered that was in between the two. I guess I would say it was like a fur vest. We took all three of those, created a questionnaire, and presented it to our staff. As it turned out, the vest hardly got any votes at all. [Laughs] Everyone seemed to be fairly evenly split between the ears-and-tail and the full suit. Looking at those two options, we decided that the full suit made it easier to see the transformation on Mario.

These days there seem to be two separate Mario development teams: your EAD Tokyo team and the team in Kyoto that primarily





works on the side-scrolling titles. Is there much collaboration between the two teams in terms of sharing ideas or providing feedback?
Well, we do tend to share in terms of new enemies. For example, those little fish skeletons that were introduced in Super Mario Galaxy? I believe those were later used in New Super Mario Bros. Wii. But we don't really share ideas on the level of Pro Skater Mario. [Laughs]
[Ed's note: During his recent presentation at the Game Developers Conference, Hayashida joked about giving Mario a Pro Skater Suit.]

When you're creating a Mario game, how do you find the right balance between bringing back classic elements that fans have grown to love and introducing new stuff?
As I mentioned earlier, we generally tend to think about gameplay first and then figure out how that gameplay is best represented visually. That was the case with this game, but there are so many Super Mario Bros. 3 fans on our team that a lot of the graphic expressions they suggested came from that title. I think that's why we had so much of that look and feel in this game. But any time that we come across a gameplay idea that doesn't have some suitable graphic expression that can be found in older, familiar Mario games, we go ahead and create some new graphic element to represent that. Or if we feel like the expression from an old game isn't doing as good a job as a new one could, then we'll create something new. We just want to go for what's best.

In a lot of past Mario games, the worlds were often tied together with particular themes—a desert world, an ice world, etc. That wasn't the case for this game, so what would you say was your approach to unifying each world?
I guess when I think back on Super Mario Galaxy—or maybe it's just all the 3D Mario games in general—we don't usually have an entire run of stages that are all of a single theme like you might find in 2D Mario games. When it comes to my personal preference, I have to say that I enjoy a little bit of variety in the backgrounds when I'm playing through stages. So rather than go through an entire world of six snow stages, I'd prefer to go to a swimming stage, then a desert stage, then a snow stage. That kind of variety feels like more fun to me.

When you "beat" Super Mario 3D Land and save the princess, you're really only at the halfway point. We don't know that we've ever played a game with so much content *after* the credits roll. What was the thinking behind that?
We had 96 stages planned for this game, and we had to decide where the ending should be among those stages. In some of the other Mario games, you'll probably see an 80-20 ratio, with 80% of the stages coming before the ending. But this time we went with 50% because we just wanted more people to be able to see the ending, even if they weren't super-hardcore players. Also, in the older games, there was always some surprise after you beat them. In the first Super Mario Bros., you could go back through the game after you beat it for a new challenge; all of the Goombas would be replaced with Buzzy Beetles, for instance. I wanted to echo that kind of structure and surprise that you had from those games.

You touched on this a little bit when we were discussing the toughest thing about making a Mario game, but is there any extra pressure working on game that's being relied on to sell systems? And is there any extra satisfaction that comes from knowing that your game played a role in a platform's good fortunes?
Certainly there are situations like that, and you can't ignore it as a consideration. It's always rolling around somewhere in your head. But I don't know if there's anything I could point to and say what we did differently as a result of that. I certainly am happy that it's doing well—both the Nintendo 3DS and Super Mario 3D Land.

Beyond just Mario, what would you say is the key to making a great platformer?
It's a secret! [Laughs] I would say that one big element is being very careful with how you design a game around the experience of failure and disappointment. So for example, if someone is going to fail in a game—and they probably will at some point—they need to be able to see the reason for why that happened in order to avoid getting frustrated. If a player is failing in a game over and over again for no discernable reason, then they're not learning anything about how they can correct their gameplay. And that leads to an inevitable sense of frustration.

So the experience that we're going for is that when a player makes a mistake and fails, they say to themselves, "OK, that was dumb of me. I know what I did there. I'm actually much better than that and I'm going to prove it!" So if I had to say that there was a secret [to making a great platformer], maybe that's it.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

SERIOUSLY COOL STUFF FOR SERIOUS NINTENDO FANS

Pick a Fight

The world-famous warriors of Street Fighter II are now available as fully articulated 4" action figures! Choose from Ryu vs. Sagat or Ken vs. Blanka to re-create your favorite bouts in collectible form. Produced by Jazwares, each duo is priced at approximately $15.

Mortal Kom-Bots

Relive the glory days of M-rated arcade and Super NES hit Mortal Kombat 3 with this cyborg ninja action figure three-pack from Jazwares. Comprising Sektor, Cyrax, and Smoke, the set is available for about $22.

The Gang's All Here

Banpresto continues its line of 2" nonposable Super Mario figurines with its Super Mario Mini Figure Collection Series 3. The lineup includes Fire Mario, Princess Peach, Yoshi, Toad, Donkey Kong, and Dixie Kong. Each figure will set you back close to $6.

GAME FORECAST

NINTENDO 3DS

The Amazing Spider-Man	Activision	6/12
Angler's Club: Ultimate Bass Fishing 3D	D3	2012
Animal Crossing*	Nintendo	TBA
BloodRayne: The Shroud	Majesco	TBA
Boulder Dash XL 3D	Giant	TBA
A Boy and His Blob	Majesco	TBA
Carnival Games Wild West 3D	Take-Two	TBA
Chevy Camaro: Wild Ride	Storm City	TBA
Chocobo Racing 3D*	Square Enix	TBA
Contra*	Konami	TBA
Crash-City GP	Rocket	TBA
de Blob 2	THQ	TBA
Dragon Ball*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Dragon Quest*	Square Enix	TBA
Dynasty Warriors*	Tecmo Koei	TBA
Disney Epic Mickey: Power of Illusion	Disney	FALL 12
Etrian Odyssey*	Atlus	TBA
Final Fantasy*	Square Enix	TBA
Fractured Soul: Deep Void	Ignition	SUM 12
Gundam*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Heroes of Ruin	Square Enix	SPR 12
Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance	Square Enix	7/12
LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes	Warner Bros.	SUM 12
LEGO City Stories	Nintendo	2012
Lion's Pride: Adventures in the Serengeti	Majesco	TBA
Lovely Lisa 3D	Tomy	TBA
Luigi's Mansion 2	Nintendo	2012
Madagascar 3: The Video Game	D3	6/12
Mahjong 3D: Warriors of the Emperor	Giant	TBA
Martha Stewart	Majesco	TBA
Monster 4x4 3DS	Ubisoft	TBA
Naruto Shippuden Action*	Tomy	TBA
Ninja Gaiden*	Tecmo Koei	TBA
Paper Mario*	Nintendo	TBA
Planet Crashers	Ignition	SUM 12
Professor Layton and the Mask of Miracle*	Level-5	TBA
Puzzler World 3DS	Ubisoft	TBA
Raving Rabbids 5*	Ubisoft	TBA
Rhythm Thief & the Emperor's Treasure	Sega	6/12
Shin Megami Tensei: Persona*	Atlus	TBA
Sudoku Premier Edition	Majesco	TBA
Super Robot*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Super Smash Bros.*	Nintendo	TBA
Theatrhythm Final Fantasy	Square Enix	SUM 12
Transformers: Prime—The Game	Activision	FALL 12
Virtue's Last Reward	Aksys	2012
VS-robo	Rocket	TBA
WonderWorld Amusement Park	Majesco	TBA

Wii

The Amazing Spider-Man	Activision	6/12
Brave: The Video Game	Disney	SUM 12
Disney Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two	Disney	FALL 12
Karaoke Joysound	Konami	2012
The Last Story	Xseed	SUM 12
LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes	Warner Bros.	SUM 12
Madagascar 3: The Video Game	D3	6/12
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	6/12
Skylanders: Giants	Activision	FALL 12
Transformers: Prime—The Game	Activision	FALL 12
Young Justice: Legacy	Little Orbit	2013

Wii U

Aliens: Colonial Marines	Sega	TBA
Assassin's Creed III	Ubisoft	TBA
Batman: Arkham City	Warner Bros.	TBA
Darksiders II	THQ	TBA
Killer Freaks from Outer Space	Ubisoft	TBA
LEGO City Stories	Nintendo	TBA
Metro: Last Light	THQ	TBA
Ninja Gaiden 3: Razor's Edge	Tecmo Koei	TBA
Pikmin*	Nintendo	TBA
Super Smash Bros.*	Nintendo	TBA
Tekken*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Online	Ubisoft	TBA

NINTENDO DS

Adventure Time	TBA	TBA
The Amazing Spider-Man	Activision	6/12
Brave: The Video Game	Disney	SUM 12
LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes	Warner Bros.	SUM 12
Pokémon Black Version 2	Nintendo	FALL 12
Pokémon White Version 2	Nintendo	FALL 12
Pokémon Conquest	Nintendo	6/12
Sesame Street: Elmo's Musical Monsterpiece	Warner Bros.	TBA
Transformers: Prime—The Game	Activision	FALL 12
Young Justice: Legacy	Little Orbit	2013

RED TEXT = GAMES ADDED THIS MONTH.

* TENTATIVE TITLE

NOTE: RELEASE DATES OFTEN CHANGE.

ALL NINTENDO 3DS SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.

READERS' MOST WANTED

Vote for your favorites at www.nintendopower.com/polls

NINTENDO 3DS

1. Paper Mario*
2. Luigi's Mansion 2
3. Animal Crossing*
4. Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance
5. Professor Layton and the Mask of Miracle*

Wii

1. The Last Story
2. Skylanders: Giants
3. LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes
4. Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two
5. The Amazing Spider-Man

Wii U

1. Batman: Arkham City
2. Assassin's Creed III
3. LEGO City Stories
4. Tekken*
5. Darksiders II

DOWNLOAD

IN THIS SECTION

WiiWARE PREVIEW
Retro City Rampage

NINTENDO eSHOP PREVIEW
Johnny Kung Fu

NINTENDO eSHOP UPDATE
Mighty Switch Force!

NINTENDO eSHOP UPDATE
Cave Story

NINTENDO eSHOP PREVIEW
Bomb Monkey

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ZOMBIE SLAYER DIOX

N3DS 3D CLASSICS REVIEWS
3D CLASSICS: KID ICARUS

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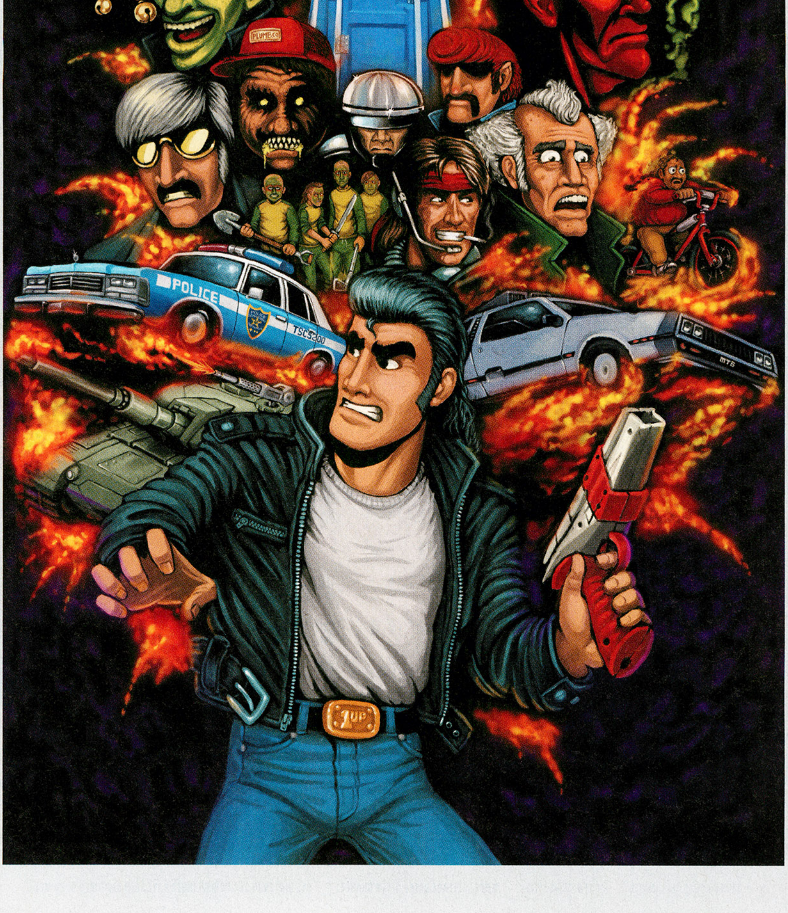
METROID
PUNCH-OUT!! FEATURING MR. DREAM
SHINOBI
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG: TRIPLE TROUBLE

DSiWARE REVIEWS
AHH! SPOT THE DIFFERENCE
PIRATES ASSAULT
ZUMA'S REVENGE

Wii VIRTUAL CONSOLE REVIEWS
THE KING OF FIGHTERS '97
SAMURAI SHODOWN IV: AMAKUSA'S REVENGE



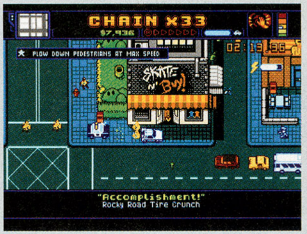
Ten Things to Do in Theftropolis Before You Die

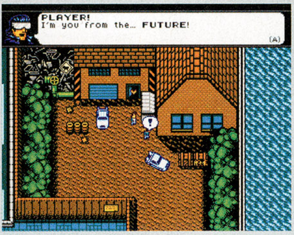
There's an awful lot to see and do in Retro City Rampage. Check out some of the exciting antics in this 8-bit homage.

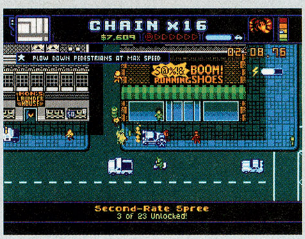
If you've been reading Nintendo Power for a while, you've undoubtedly seen coverage of Vblank Entertainment's Retro City Rampage before. This upcoming WiiWare title is a playable love letter to '80s and '90s pop culture by way of a Grand Theft Auto-inspired open-world action game. When you first take control of RCR's antihero, the aptly named Player, you might feel overwhelmed. After all, the pixelated burg of Theftropolis provides plenty of opportunities for an aspiring thug, and with an entire city to explore you're never at a loss for something to do. To help you focus on the options, we've outlined 10 activities to keep in mind for your trip to the Retro City. **—PHIL T.**

1 See Your Future

Player's excellent adventure begins in 1988, but an encounter with a time-traveling port-a-potty soon hurtles him to the far-off year of 20XX. There he meets Doc Choc, a crazed scientist who offers to help fix the now-busted time machine. The chronological confusion doesn't end there, however. Before long, Player meets up with a future version of himself who has traveled back by means of one of Doc's inventions—a car that looks suspiciously like a DeLorean. Future Player informs you that that this new time machine isn't powered by plutonium, but by the force generated by running over pedestrians. Yikes! How quickly can you run over 88 innocent people?

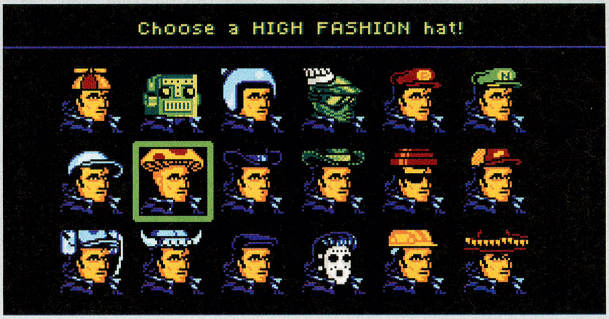

CHAIN x33
$7,936
PLOW DOWN PEDESTRIANS AT MAX SPEED
02:13.36
SKATE N' BUY!
"Accomplishment!"
Rocky Road Tire Crunch


PLAYER!
I'm you from the… FUTURE!


CHAIN x16
$7,609
PLOW DOWN PEDESTRIANS AT MAX SPEED
02:08.76
S@%!& BOOM! RUNNINGSHOES
MON'S LAUNDER HOUSE
Second-Rate Spree
3 of 23 Unlocked!

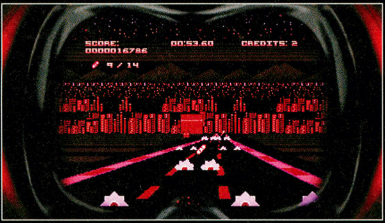
2 Change Your Style

Despite hailing from the glamorous 1980s, Player looks like a 1950s hoodlum. We're talking a black leather jacket, Elvis sideburns, and a pompadour that's practically dripping with greasy stuff. Sure, it's a fine look for a street tough, but we wouldn't blame you if you want to change Player's appearance. Fortunately, several shops around Theftropolis allow you to do just that. Pop into one of them and drop some ill-gotten coins on a new hairstyle, hats, and tattoos. Plenty of the new looks are nods to pop culture, too, so if you want to sport a Mr. T-style Mohawk or a Nintendo-evocative mushroom hat, you have those options.


Choose a HIGH FASHION hat!

Cameo a-Go-Go

One of the most impressive diversions in Retro City Rampage is a trio of minigames inspired by other indie games. Playing through these even unlocks bonuses in the main game.

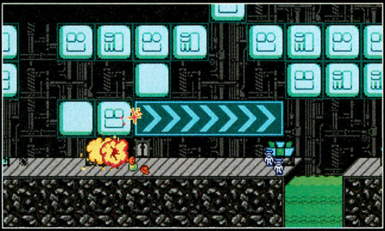


VIRTUAL MEAT BOY—Control Meat Boy, the star of Super Meat Boy, as he runs down a meat grinder–laden street, collecting bandages as he goes. Snag all of the bandages, and Meat Boy becomes playable in Free Roam mode. As an added bonus, this game includes a 3D mode (red-and-blue glasses not included).

SCORE:
0000610000
CREDITS: 1
46 / 54
SUPER

SCORE:
0000360000
CREDITS: 0
21 / 40
SUPER

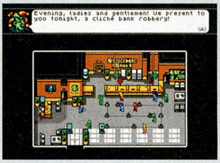
BIT.TRIP RETRO CITY—If you've played Bit.Trip Runner on WiiWare or in Bit.Trip Complete for Wii, you know what to expect here. As CommanderVideo automatically runs forward, you make him jump and kick his way past obstacles while picking up the bars of gold scattered throughout each level. Diligent collectors will unlock the commander in Free Roam mode.

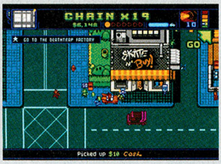


8-BIT SPLOSION MAN—Splosion Man, the star of his own self-titled game, gets to go back in time and see what life would be like as an NES character. This pseudo-8-bit outing plays surprisingly similarly to its current-gen big brother. Splosion Man has the ability to triple-jump by detonating his entire body. You must master his trajectories to make it past a series of tricky platforms. Is there a way to play as Splosion Man in Free Roam mode? Mmaaaaybe.

3 Avenge the Night

Who hasn't dreamed of being a caped crusader? Retro City Rampage provides the opportunity to not just roleplay as a superhero, but to work as a villainous henchman. The game begins with a mission that finds Player working for the clownish rogue The Jester. You'll partake in a bank robbery that's an awful lot like the heist from the beginning of the film *The Dark Knight*. Later in the game, you'll discover the true identity of Biffman, Theftropolis's very own do-gooder. After breaking into his mansion, you can swipe the Biffmobile for your own uses.

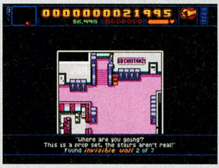

Evening, ladies and gentlemen! We present to you tonight, a cliché bank robbery!



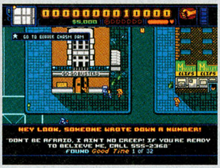
Picked up $10 Cash.

4 Collect Goodies

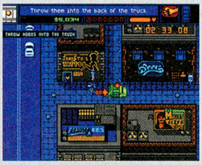
Naturally, in a city as big as Theftropolis, there are a lot of secrets to discover. These include a mess of collectible items scattered in back alleys and tucked-away corners. Only the most diligent players will be able to find all of the hidden packages and pay phones (complete with "for a good time, call..." messages scrawled on them). Amusingly, you also get bonuses for discovering invisible barriers throughout the city. These video game staples are a convenient way of preventing players from wandering off the map, and Retro City Rampage makes no effort to hide the fact that some doors simply have nothing behind them.



"Where are you going?
This is a prop set, the stairs aren't real!"
Found invisible wall 2 of 7



HEY LOOK, SOMEONE WROTE DOWN A NUMBER!
"DON'T BE AFRAID, I AIN'T NO CREEP! IF YOU'RE READY TO BELIEVE ME, CALL 555-2368"
FOUND Good Time 1 of 32

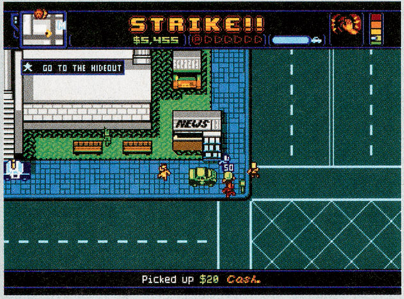

Throw them into the back of the truck.

5 Get a Job

In addition to the game's main story, which has you collecting parts to repair your time machine, there are plenty of side quests to pass the time. These jobs add quite a bit of variety to your usual thug life, allowing you to act as a bouncer, "acquire" goods to sell to a pawn shop, clean up the city by tossing hobos into the back of a garbage truck, and plant bombs to blow up a dam (in a reference to a notoriously difficult level from the NES version of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles). One involved side quest has you joining the Go-Go Busters, a team of exterminators who use unlicensed nuclear accelerators to zap dancers at a gentlemen's club.

6 Roam Where You Want To

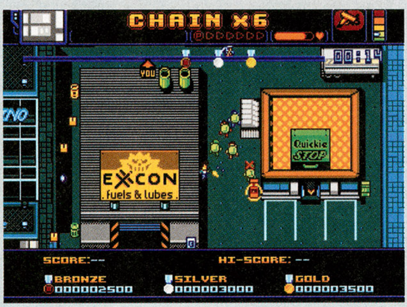
Sometimes you just need to cause a bit of destruction without annoyances like mission objectives getting in your way. That's when you fire up Free Roam mode and go nuts in Theftropolis. You make the rules here, so just relax and have fun. Cameo junkies will love this mode due to the different playable characters that you can control (see sidebar).

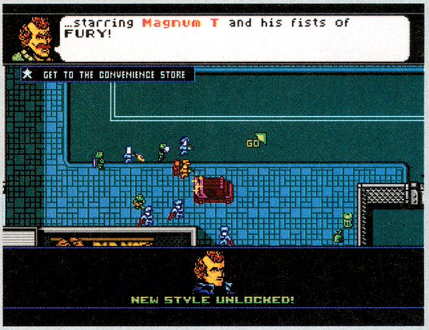

STRIKE!!
$5,455
GO TO THE HIDEOUT
NEWS
50

Picked up $20 Cash.

7 Go on a Spree

For the purest in mindless mayhem, take some time out to go on a spree. These timed challenges let you loose on the city streets with the simple goal of taking out as many people as possible with a specific weapon. You can record and rewatch your rampages, and you can even compare your scores on the online leaderboards.


CHAIN X6
00:14
YOU
EXCON
fuels & lubes
Quickie STOP
SCORE: --
HI-SCORE: --
BRONZE
000002500
SILVER
000003000
GOLD
000003500



...starring Magnum T and his fists of FURY!

GET TO THE CONVENIENCE STORE
GO
NEW STYLE UNLOCKED!

8 Take a Drive

One of the biggest draws of open-world crime simulators is the ability to hop into any car on the road and drive away. You can do that in Retro City Rampage, of course, and in keeping with the game's old-school theme, you're bound to jack a few familiar rides. We've already discussed time-traveling DeLoreans and Bat-cars, but you'll also encounter vehicles inspired by such famous conveyances as the Ghostbusters' Ecto-1, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles' party wagon, and the A-Team's van. There's even a motorcycle fashioned after the Mushroom Kingdom's favorite green dinosaur.

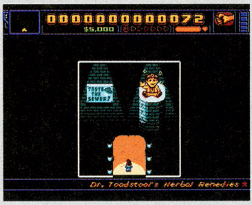
9 Score Extra Coin

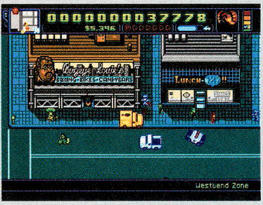
You will undoubtedly need a little extra cash while in Theftropolis, and there are several ways to get it. In addition to the various missions and side quests, you have a few other nontraditional moneymaking opportunities. If you, ahem, reappropriate a taxi, you can activate a driving mission that takes a few cues from Sega's Crazy Taxi. Pick up passengers and drop them at their destination to earn an honest fare. You can then head over to the donkey tracks to place a few bets. Of course, since Player is a video game character, he can always make a few coins appear by jumping on the heads of the good citizens of Theftropolis, too.

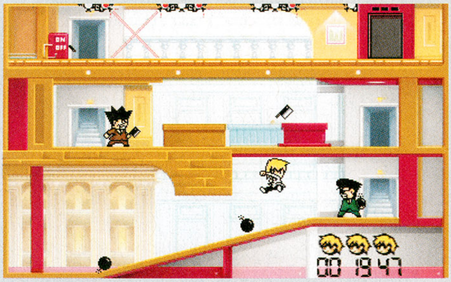
0000000010429

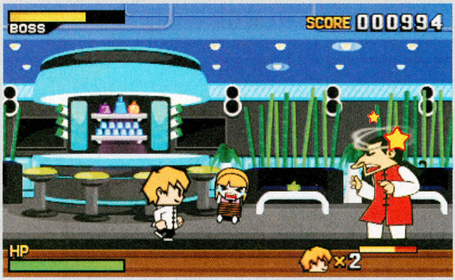
10 Count the References

In case you haven't picked this up from the rest of this article, Retro City Rampage is chock-full of humorous references to countless other video games, movies, TV shows, and other aspects of pop culture. Within minutes of starting the game, we came across jokes about DuckTales, Contra, Bionic Commando, Duck Hunt, and Mega Man 2. As you explore the city, you'll find stores and billboards paying homage to Dr. Mario, *Thundercats*, Duke Nukem, Double Dragon, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, and plenty more. Go ahead and try to keep track of the gags—we dare you.


000000000072
$5,000
TASTE THE SEWER!
Dr. Toadstool's Herbal Remedies


000000037778
$5,346
LUNCH
Westbend Zone





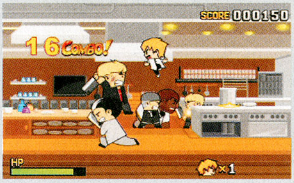
Watch Out, Johnny!

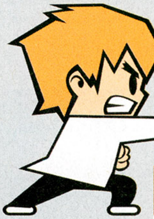
The Game & Watch–inspired Johnny Kung Fu punches its way to the Nintendo eShop.

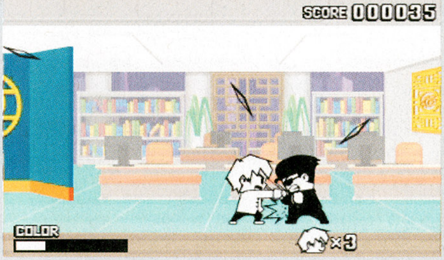
NINTENDO FANS HAVE been treated to many retro-themed video games in recent years, but UFO Interactive's Johnny Kung Fu for the Nintendo 3DS handheld is in a class by itself. While most old-school games draw upon the 8- or 16-bit eras, Johnny Kung Fu delves even deeper into the well: it's based, at least in part, on static-screen LCD games such as Nintendo's Game & Watch titles (the first of which was released in 1980). If you've ever played one of those vintage devices, then you know what that means: simple controls, straightforward action, a monochromatic color palette, limited character movement and animation, and an emphasis on patterns and reflex-oriented gameplay. Admittedly, this type of game is more restrictive than modern releases, but when it's done right it can be a lot of fun—and judging by what we've played so far, Johnny Kung Fu nails it.

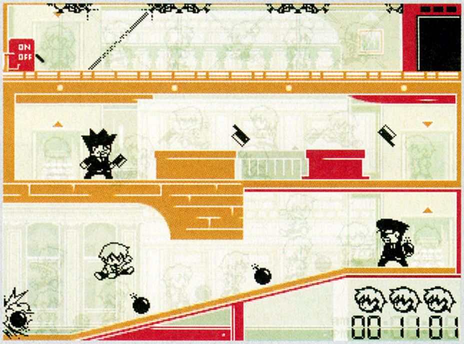
Controlling the titular Johnny, you'll have to master the classic-style gameplay to leap over bombs, duck under throwing knives, punch out thugs, and dodge security lasers as you make your way through the Mr. Wang Gang's skyscraper in an attempt to rescue your kidnapped girlfriend, Paula. When you reach the elevator that lies beyond the hazards and ascend to the next floor, however, the game undergoes a transformation—it drops the Game & Watch guise to become a much more modern 2D beat-'em-up in which you'll unleash an arsenal of punches and kicks to beat the tar out of a seemingly nonstop army of foes. As you progress through the stages you'll alternate between the two play styles, with a few variations—such as 3D-enhanced Game & Watch scenes with flashier visuals—thrown in for good measure. But you won't have much time to admire the sights; there are more than 30 floors to conquer, and you have to overcome them all within a one-hour time limit or else Paula is history.

With its unique style and fun mix of old and new, Johnny Kung Fu is shaping up to be one of the most interesting Nintendo eShop offerings yet. And you won't have to wait long to play it; the game should be out soon, if it isn't already available by the time you read this. —**CHRIS H.**





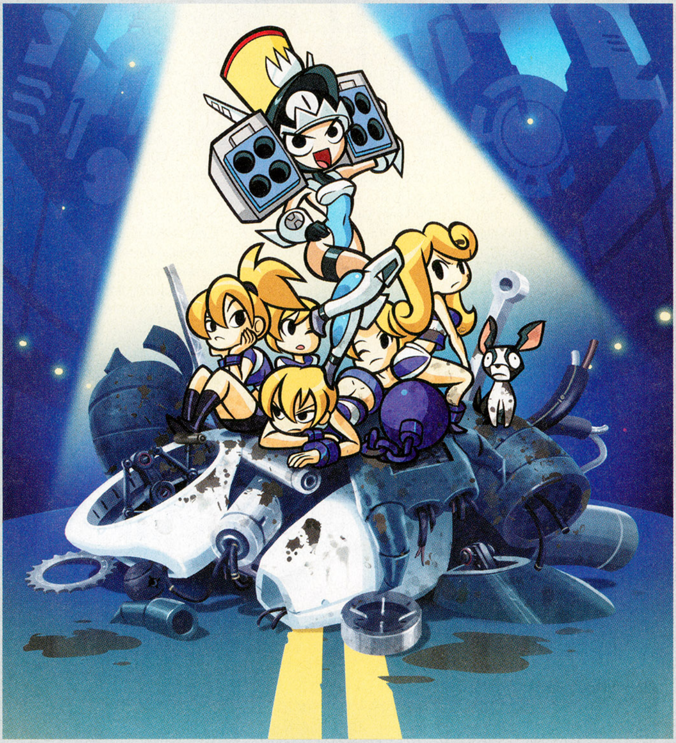


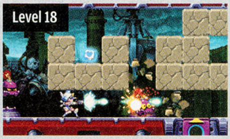


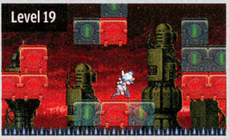
Reflipping the Switch

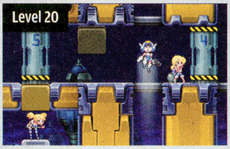
New levels and more are coming to eShop sensation Mighty Switch Force!

WHEN MIGHTY SWITCH FORCE! was released for the Nintendo eShop late last year, it proved itself to be one of the service's best offerings thanks to gorgeous visuals, excellent controls, and a fantastic mix of puzzles and action. In fact, it could be argued that the game's only flaw is that it was a bit on the short side. Luckily, developer WayForward has taken steps to correct that; an updated version of the game is on its way to the eShop, providing five all-new levels. The update will also enhance the stereoscopic 3D effect in the previously existing levels and add a quick-retry button designed specifically for players trying to finish stages in record time. Best of all, it will be totally free for anyone who already owns the game (and new users will be able to get the complete, refreshed version for the original price of $5.99). Look for the update in the very near future. **—CHRIS H.**



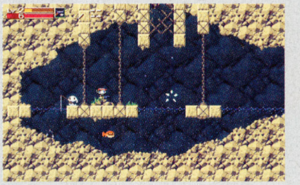






Neverending Story

Play it again, Quote! An upgraded version of Cave Story is coming to the Nintendo eShop.



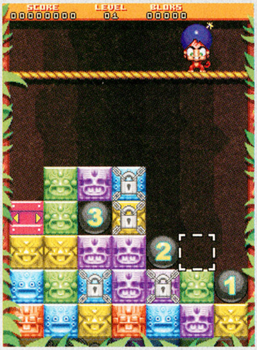
ACTION-ADVENTURE GAME Cave Story has been released in a number of forms over the last few years—most notably as WiiWare, DSiWare, and at retail on the Nintendo 3DS handheld. Now publisher Nicalis is bringing a new version of the acclaimed title to the Nintendo eShop. Though retaining the 2D visuals that helped make Cave Story a cult hit, the eShop version adds a widescreen presentation and stereoscopic 3D effects to its feature list. The game will also have a jukebox mode, adjustable controls, and several challenge modes, including Boss Rush, Curly Story, Hell Time Attack, Wind Fortress, Nemesis Challenge, and possibly more. Plans may call for the DSiWare version of Cave Story to be removed from the eShop when the new version becomes available (which should be very soon—maybe by the time you read this), but the old DSiWare version will remain in the Nintendo DSi Shop for Nintendo DSi owners. **—CHRIS H.**

Monkeying Around

Simians explode onto the Nintendo eShop in Renegade Kid's Bomb Monkey.

HOT ON THE heels of the success of its retro platformer Mutant Mudds, developer Renegade Kid is preparing another title for the Nintendo eShop: Bomb Monkey. Though stylistically different from the company's previous offerings—it's an arcade-style falling-block puzzler—Bomb Monkey should nonetheless appeal to anyone looking for a quick fix of pick-up-and-play action.

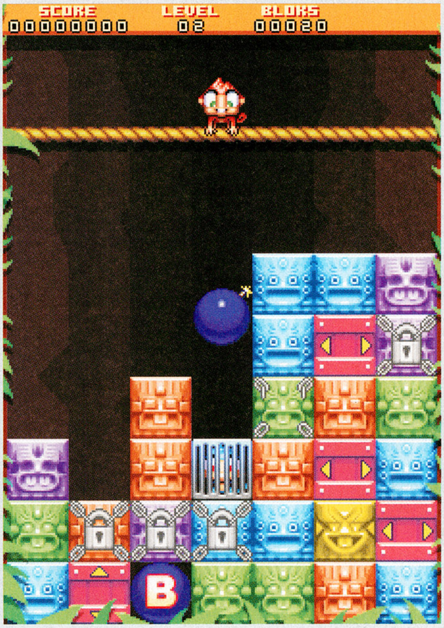
Holding the Nintendo 3DS system sideways so the screens are oriented vertically, you'll use the Control Pad or Circle Pad to move your monkey back and forth along the top of the screen, and press down to drop colored blocks wherever you see fit. Meanwhile, the ever-growing stack rises from the bottom of the screen; if it reaches your monkey's location, it's game over. Fortunately, your monkey will randomly acquire bombs, which you can use to destroy any nearby blocks. If blocks of the same color are positioned next to each other and any one of them is hit by a bomb, the entire cluster will explode in a chain reaction. (If you think this sounds a bit like classic puzzle game Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo, you're not wrong.)



To keep things interesting, however, you'll also have to deal with locked blocks (which take multiple bomb hits to destroy) and special red boxes that, when detonated, will unleash explosions that can destroy an entire row or column of blocks. By strategically positioning red boxes, you can set up massive combos that obliterate almost everything in sight. And if that's not explosive enough, you should keep an eye out for spheres marked with letters. Destroy the spheres to spell the word *BOMB*, and you'll enter Bomb Monkey Time, which temporarily lets you drop unlimited bombs.

In addition to a traditional Endless mode—in which you simply destroy as many blocks and rack up as high a score as possible before you lose—the game includes several variations. In Rescue mode your goal is to use your bombs to destroy a cage so you can free a fellow monkey, and in Numbers mode you'll have to destroy numbered spheres in the correct order. You can also enjoy the game with a friend in Versus and Co-op modes using a single N3DS system; in these modes, the action unfolds over both screens, and the second player controls his monkey using the X, A, and B Buttons.

Bomb Monkey should be available in the Nintendo eShop this summer. **—CHRIS H.**



THE PRIME PRIMATE

To find out more about Bomb Monkey—and what else Renegade Kid is up to—we spoke to the company's cofounder and director Jools Watsham (who also happens to be the game's designer and artist). Here's what he had to say about monkeys, the Nintendo eShop, and more.

NINTENDO POWER Bomb Monkey seems like kind of a change of pace for Renegade Kid. Why'd you want to make a game like this?

JOOLS WATSHAM The core game design for Bomb Monkey is something I have been kicking around for many years. I have always been fascinated by how simple and addictive Tetris is. I like to make games that I too can enjoy playing, even after having spent many hours playing it during development. A never-ending puzzle game, like Bomb Monkey, is a fun "toy" that you can always enjoy because it is different every time you play it.

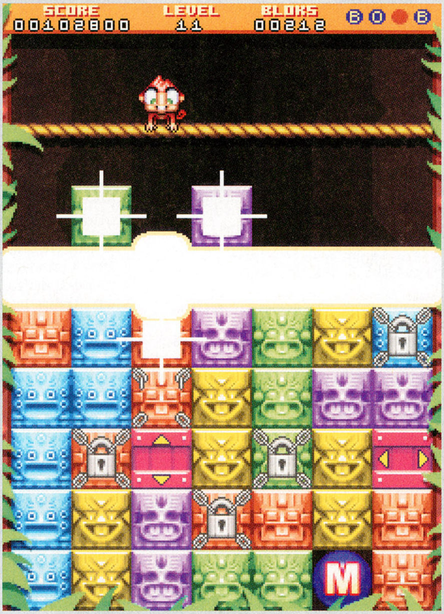
So...why a monkey?

Everyone loves monkeys, right? Well, maybe not everyone. I have gone through a number of different theme ideas for the game, including a blue-collar warehouse worker, but felt that a cheeky little monkey with bombs was an appealing theme to spark people's imagination. Something that was important to me was to present the game with a whimsical personality. That is something missing, in my opinion, from the more-abstract games like Tetris and Columns. I find that I connect more with games like Mr. Driller and Pushmo because they have fun themes and a lot of personality.

What are some of your favorite puzzle games, or ones that you used as a measuring stick for Bomb Monkey?
Tetris was the main inspiration for Bomb Monkey from a gameplay perspective. It was a personal challenge for me: Can I create a game with a similar sense of "impending doom" to that found in Tetris? What's so poetic about the basic concept is that the pieces you are given to fight off the threat are the very things that cause your demise. I found myself analyzing the timings of Tetris to get a feel for how quickly the pace of gameplay sped up, and how many lines you needed to destroy to move from one level to the next.

Do you think there's some risk involved in making a Nintendo 3DS game that doesn't use 3D?
Sure, it instantly loses that cool factor that a lot of N3DS game can offer, such as our very own Mutant Mudds. But at the end of the day the most important thing with Bomb Monkey was to provide a fun puzzle experience that players can enjoy for a few minutes of fun when they are waiting for a bus, or find themselves in a boring class, meeting, or otherwise indisposed in the bathroom. Rotating the N3DS to view the screen in a portrait position, instead of the traditional landscape view, allows the game to take advantage of a tall screen.

Given the lack of 3D, why make this a Nintendo 3DS eShop game rather than a DSiWare release?
The 3DS offers a higher screen resolution and more graphical effects. Plus, why live in the past when you can live in the future? The eShop is the new and cool market. Recent DSiWare titles seem to be tucked away and more hidden when compared to the new eShop games. Bomb Monkey can hopefully get more attention and exposure as an eShop title.



What's your favorite mode in Bomb Monkey?
The classic Endless mode is my favorite. It is great to jump in and see how far you can get with the hope that you'll push past your previous high score. The other modes provide some nice variety, but I always find myself coming back to the main game mode.

What makes Bomb Monkey an ideal eShop game?
It is fun. It is easy to play. It is inexpensive (approximately $4.99). You can play it for a few minutes. It's a nice bite-sized chunk of entertainment.

In general, what do you like about the Nintendo eShop? And is there anything in particular you'd do to improve it?
I really like the concept of having games that live on my N3DS. Being able to quickly access them at any time without having to find the cartridge is a simple but delightful perk. I am very impressed by the eShop. The only thing that I would like to see is a way to view games by category, such as genre and alphabetical order.

What do you think the best way is for developers to utilize the eShop's untapped potential?
The eShop can handle full retail-size games. There really are no limits to what can be released on the eShop. I would love to see some large games released on the eShop so we can move toward a digital-only market.

If you were a new Nintendo 3DS owner, what are the first five games you'd download from the eShop? Well, I'll assume one would be Mutant Mudds, so what four after that?
Absolutely, no one's eShop collection would be complete without Mutant Mudds! I would also recommend Pushmo, Shantae, Dillon's Rolling Western, and Cave Story. If I could add a couple more, it would be Dark Void Zero and Gargoyle's Quest. I'm quite fond of Super Mario Bros. too. OK, I know that's too many, but I couldn't help myself. There's a ton of great stuff on there!

Do you prefer making games on the scale of Bomb Monkey and Mutant Mudds, or would you prefer to make something with a bigger budget?
I like doing both. What's nice about smaller-scale projects, like Mutant Mudds and Bomb Monkey, is that we can self-fund and self-publish them, which is a glorious thing. Larger-scale projects typically require funding from a third party, which can complicate the process. I hope that we can self-fund and self-publish a large-scale project for eShop in the future. Anyone fancy a new and original FPS for eShop?

How did you become involved with the pitchWinPLAY contest, and why is it something that you wanted to be a part of?
John Kaiser is a good friend of mine. He is the founder of GAMEscribe, the company behind pitchWinPLAY. John called me one day and was excited to share his idea with me. I instantly thought it was brilliant. We knew it was not going to be easy to get off the ground, but the idea was too good not to at least try. I wanted to be involved because it not only enables young designers to get involved in the process, but also creates a sense of unique excitement around a game, which is always a good thing.

What do you hope is the ultimate result of having a contest like this?
Hopes and dreams. That is the ultimate result of having a contest like this. It demonstrates that anyone can make something happen if they put their mind to it. I hope it inspires people to follow their dreams and do what they love to do, and get to do that for the rest of their lives. Making games is a gift that I truly enjoy each day, and I know I am lucky to have a career that I love.

So what's next for you guys on the Nintendo eShop?
I am really excited to announce that we are developing a 3D-enhanced version of our "cult racing hit," ATV Wild Ride for the eShop. It is called ATV Wild Ride 3D. Yeah, we added 3D on the end. I bet you didn't see that name coming! ATV racing might not be everyone's cup of tea, but what I love about our ATV game is that it doesn't take itself too seriously. It is a fun arcade racer more akin to Mario Kart than a racing simulator. Taking advantage of the Nintendo 3DS has taken our humble DS game and turned it into something really special.

EVALUATION STATION

Wii VIRTUAL CONSOLE

48
PRESS START
CREDITS 03

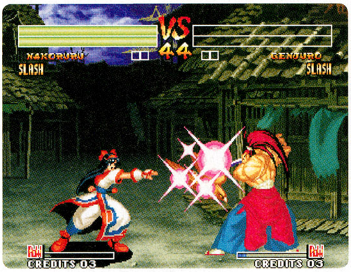
THE KING OF FIGHTERS '97

PLATFORM: **NEOGEO**
ORIGINALLY RELEASED: **1997**
PUBLISHER: **D4 ENTERPRISE/SNK**
GENRE: **FIGHTING**
PRICE: **900 POINTS**

As much as I like The King of Fighters, I can't really recommend that you purchase this particular series entry unless you're a die-hard fan of the franchise (in which case you probably own this game already in one form or another). KOF '97 is certainly a solid fighting experience, but I feel that your 900 points—a relatively high sum compared to other Virtual Console games—could be better spent on other titles. —**JUSTIN C.**

Hmmm...

Wii VIRTUAL CONSOLE



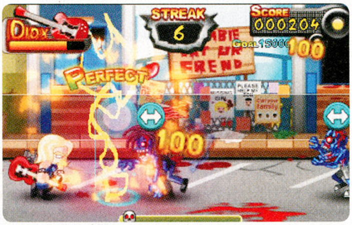
SAMURAI SHODOWN IV: AMAKUSA'S REVENGE

PLATFORM: **NEOGEO** ORIGINALLY RELEASED: **1996**
PUBLISHER: **D4 ENTERPRISE/SNK** GENRE: **FIGHTING** PRICE: **900 POINTS**

I've long considered Samurai Shodown IV to be the second-best installment in SNK's weapons-based-fighting series (the best is Samurai Shodown II), and playing the game again on Virtual Console reminded me why I like it so much. The character sprites look fantastic and the one-on-one combat is just plain fun. But the price of entry is a bit on the steep side—especially considering that this title doesn't exactly offer a wealth of content to keep you coming back for more. —**JUSTIN C.**

Recommended

N3DS DOWNLOAD



ZOMBIE SLAYER DIOX

PUBLISHER: **UFO INTERACTIVE** GENRE: **RHYTHM** PRICE: **$5.99**

At first glance, Zombie Slayer Diox certainly seems worthwhile. After all, you play a samurai guitarist named Diox, who lures in the undead with face-melting solos so he can slice them in half with his katana. The slaughtering is carried out as a rhythm game in which the zombies running toward you act as notes. Above their heads are arrows indicating which direction you need to sweep the stylus, and the color of notes determines the direction you hold the Circle Pad while performing slashes. It's a unique concept and the first couple of levels are fun, but the gameplay quickly becomes tedious. Continuously lifting and sweeping the stylus to forgettable and fast-paced music grows tiring and can make it difficult to get into the rhythm, especially since the note sequences often seem repetitive and plain. —**CODY M.**

Hmmm...

N3DS 3D CLASSIC

3D CLASSICS: KID ICARUS

PLATFORM: **NES** ORIGINALLY RELEASED: **1987** PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
GENRE: **ACTION** PRICE: **$5.99**

The original Kid Icarus for NES was great, but it hasn't aged gracefully. There are odd control quirks and the way that Pit increases his abilities causes the beginning to be way too difficult and the later stages to be a bit too easy. Still, it's a fun game that provides plenty of challenge and a nice mix of gameplay types—vertical and horizontal platforming, shooting, and Zelda-ish dungeons. Oh, and the soundtrack is top-notch. This remake retains everything that's good (and not so good) about the original, but with a fresh look thanks to the 3D effect and some gorgeous sprite-based backgrounds that replace the black voids of the NES version. Updated controls make Pit easier to maneuver, as well, giving further reason to revisit this game. —**PHIL T.**

Recommended

N3DS VIRTUAL CONSOLE

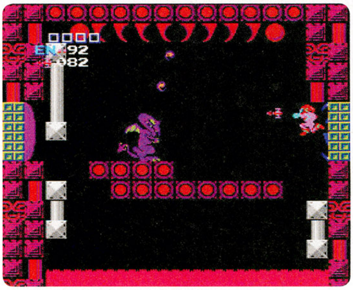
DRAGON CRYSTAL

PLATFORM: **GAME GEAR**
ORIGINALLY RELEASED: **1992**
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
GENRE: **RPG**
PRICE: **$2.99**

Dragon Crystal is one of those "roguelike" dungeon-crawler games along the lines of the Pokémon Mystery Dungeon series. It's always nice to see another game in this niche genre, but the incredibly basic nature of this particular title isn't doing it any favors. Aside from the brief thrill of exploring randomly generated dungeons, the poor interface and lack of options wear thin quickly. —**PHIL T.**

Grumble Grumble

N3DS VIRTUAL CONSOLE



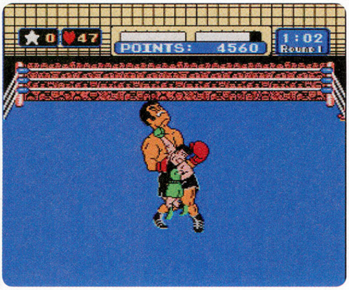
METROID

PLATFORM: **NES** ORIGINALLY RELEASED: **1987** PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
GENRE: **ADVENTURE** PRICE: **$4.99**

There's no denying that Metroid is an all-time great. It set the standard for nonlinear action-adventure games, gave birth to a franchise, and created an atmospheric world that's second to none. If you're a Metroid fan or you've never had a chance to play the game that started it all, you'd do well to add this version to your N3DS library. The recommendation isn't without caveats, however. Metroid hasn't aged as well as some classics; the lack of an in-game map is painful, and the game pales in comparison to its GBA remake, Metroid: Zero Mission. —**CHRIS H.**

Recommended

N3DS VIRTUAL CONSOLE



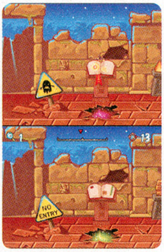
PUNCH-OUT!! FEATURING MR. DREAM

PLATFORM: NES **ORIGINALLY RELEASED:** 1990 **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
GENRE: SPORTS **PRICE:** $4.99

The harsh reality of retro gaming is that not all "classic" games are terribly fun to play nowadays. Punch-Out!!, however, doesn't have that problem. Its frantic gameplay—which requires you to carefully observe your opponent and instantly react with the proper counter move—is just as absorbing today as it was more than two decades ago. The cartoony graphics are filled with personality, and taking down Mr. Dream is still as tough as you remember. —**PHIL T.**

Recommended

DSiWARE



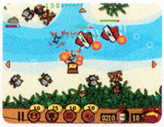
AHH! SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

PUBLISHER: GAMELION STUDIOS
GENRE: PUZZLE
PRICE: 200 POINTS/$1.99

A painfully rudimentary premise—spotting then tapping differences between the top and bottom screens—is made surprisingly engaging by Gamelion's use of motion, a manic pace, and dynamically generated content. Of course, it's still...spotting the difference. —**PATRICK C.**

Hmmm...

DSiWARE



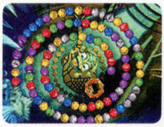
PIRATES ASSAULT

PUBLISHER: CIRCLE ENTERTAINMENT
GENRE: STRATEGY
PRICE: 200 POINTS/$1.99

Circle Entertainment invites players to fend off gold-filching pirates using a small assortment of tower defenses. Featuring bland graphics, boring tower designs, unnecessarily cruel difficulty, and the mystifying addition of furious tapping to the tower-defense canon (players acquire money for tower upgrades by angrily pecking "ghost" boats that flit about their screens), Pirates Assault is—appropriately enough—not unlike bilge scum. —**PATRICK C.**

Grumble Grumble

DSiWARE



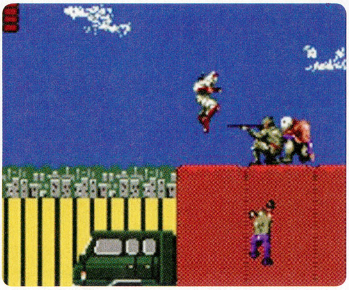
ZUMA'S REVENGE

PUBLISHER: POPCAP GAMES
GENRE: PUZZLE
PRICE: 800 POINTS/$7.99

Zuma's Revenge is one of those games that has very simple mechanics but is still wildly addictive. Launching colored balls to form combos along a snaking trail may not take much thought, but the pace is fast enough to keep things interesting. The stylus controls work well, allowing for precise control over where your shots land. A few different gameplay modes attempt to mix up the action, but the gameplay still gets repetive before long. Just play in short bursts. —**PHIL T.**

Recommended

N3DS VIRTUAL CONSOLE



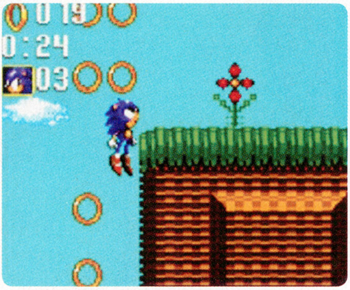
SHINOBI

PLATFORM: GAME GEAR **ORIGINALLY RELEASED:** 1991 **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
GENRE: ACTION **PRICE:** $3.99

A ninja action game with Mega Man design sensibilities, the Game Gear version of Shinobi can be a lot of fun. By today's standards it feels a bit cheap—enemies often appear out of nowhere and death can come quickly—but if you take a little time to learn the enemies' patterns and determine the best order in which to tackle the stages (and thus gain new playable characters with new abilities), the action becomes quite satisfying. Pausing the game to switch heroes and use ninja magic is a bit cumbersome, however. —**CHRIS H.**

Recommended

N3DS VIRTUAL CONSOLE



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG: TRIPLE TROUBLE

PLATFORM: GAME GEAR **ORIGINALLY RELEASED:** 1994 **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
GENRE: PLATFORMER **PRICE:** $4.99

All Sonic games are not created equal. Even though Sonic the Hedgehog: Triple Trouble looks like a classic Sonic platformer, it isn't nearly as good as the Blue Blur's Genesis outings. Loose controls make Sonic tough to handle when precision is called for, the level design is sort of dull (when it isn't confusing), and the series's trademark sense of speed takes a hit from time to time. It's not necessarily bad, but it is fairly mediocre. —**CHRIS H.**

Hmmm...

ALSO AVAILABLE

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In the Nintendo DSi Shop and Nintendo eShop, **1st Class Poker & Blackjack** (500 Points/$4.99) lets you experience the thrills of the casino without any of the risks. You can choose from several game types—including Texas Hold'em, Pineapple, and Omaha—and challenge the CPU or up to four human opponents.... Looking for something educational? You're in luck. **Carmen Sandiego Adventures in Math: The Island of Diamonds** (600 Points) is the fifth installment of the series to hit WiiWare. It also wins this month's award for longest game title.

PREVIEWS

IN THIS SECTION

Wii U PREVIEWS

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ASSASSIN'S CREED III

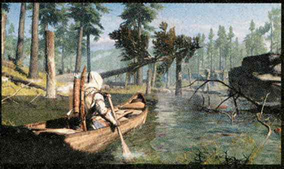
You say you want a revolution?

WITH SEVERAL CRITICALLY and financially successful titles under its belt, Assassin's Creed has quickly become one of gaming's major franchises. It's a shame, then, that Nintendo-platform owners haven't been offered the full experience of Ubisoft's parkour-and-stealth series. Sure, there have been two side-scrolling Nintendo DS games—2008's Assassin's Creed: Altaïr's Chronicles and 2009's Assassin's Creed II: Discovery—but neither of them came close to matching the sheer scope of their Mature-rated, open-world console siblings. Fortunately, Nintendo fans will be able to join in on the stealth-kill action when Assassin's Creed III is released for the Wii U console.

Despite this being the fifth iteration in the mainline series (there were three Assassin's Creed II installments), Assassin's Creed III is a good jumping-on point for neophytes. It's not required knowledge that the first game was set in the Third Crusade and was focused on a man called Altaïr, or that the second one(s) took place during the Italian Renaissance and starred Ezio Auditore—Assassin's Creed III has a brand-new setting and a brand-new protagonist. This time you're playing as a half-Mohawk, half-English man named Connor (his birth name is Ratohnhaké:ton) who is born into the Mohawk Nation. As the game progresses, Connor witnesses the destruction of his village, joins the Assassin Order (a secret organization that opposes the Templars), and fights against the redcoats during the American Revolution.

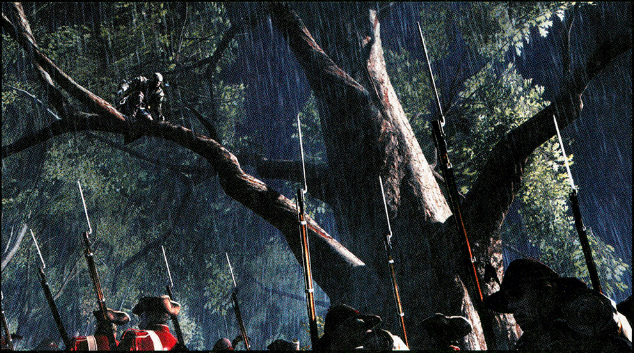
This time period allows you to interact with famous historical figures such as Benjamin Franklin, Charles Lee, and George Washington. And the setting lends itself to a wide array of environments—perhaps the most notable of which is the expansive wilderness the game calls the frontier. Ubisoft's first demonstration area begins in the winter of 1774, and Connor hops, climbs, and swings on trees before landing on the snow-covered ground. After trudging through some deep powder, he happens upon a dead body from which he takes a letter. Suddenly an aggressive bear appears behind him, but he quickly subdues the mighty beast with a quick strike of the hidden blade that springs from his wrist. Connor then scales a nearby cliff and, once at the top, surveys the ground below. He notices a company of men on the march, and a hay-filled horse-drawn wagon following them. As those who have experience with the series know, hay signifies a place that's safe to land after you dive off tall structures. Connor leaps off the cliff into the wagon and hides in the straw as the caravan continues along its course.

As Ubisoft's presentation continued, we were introduced to a new locale and time of year: Boston in the summer of 1775. Boston is one of two cities you'll be able to run around in; New York is the other. (Certain moments in the game will have you visiting Philadelphia, as well, but it's not open for exploration like Beantown and the Big Apple are.) Connor has just arrived in

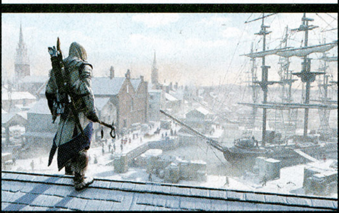


Not only can Connor traverse the environment on foot or on horseback, but he also canoes.

SCREENSHOTS MAY NOT REPRESENT FINAL Wii U VERSION OF THE GAME.



Connor's targets are out in the frontier [above] and in cities [below]. Fortunately, he's a skilled climber.



Boston via ship, and he has to walk past a British checkpoint on the docks. Unfortunately, the redcoats recognize him, so they give chase. Connor sprints away, pushing through crowds of people and leaping over carts before rushing up a flight of stairs, running through an occupied residence, jumping out a window, and climbing up a neighboring tall building to evade his pursuers.

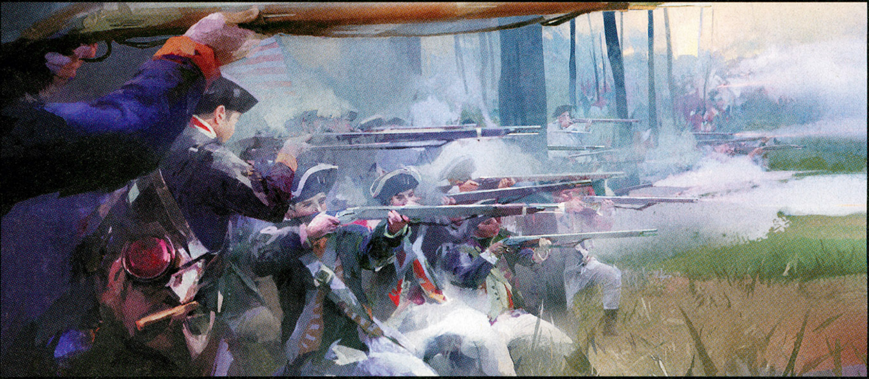
The final part Ubisoft showed us takes place during the Battle of Bunker Hill. Connor makes his way up to a mass of colonial soldiers who are preparing to enter the battleground in front of them. Because his target is on the opposite side of the combat zone, he decides to take the direct approach and cross the battlefield, avoiding both gunfire and cannonballs along the way. Once he makes it to the English-controlled area, the athletic assassin climbs to a tree branch and spots a handful of redcoats below. Connor tags the nearest trooper with a dart attached to a rope (à la Scorpion from Mortal Kombat) and uses him as a counterweight, raising the soldier up to the branch while Connor holds onto the other end of the line and descends to the ground. Connor then uses a nearby foe as a human shield. The hostage's comrades shoot the captive infantryman, giving Connor time to get in close to his opponents for some melee combat (as it takes a long time to reload a flintlock firearm). The 18th-century hit man dispatches the rest of the baddies via two-handed combat, a tomahawk in one hand and a knife in the other. Our demo concluded with Connor taking out more adversaries before executing his target with a tomahawk—a violent finale, but this *is* a game about an assassin in the Revolutionary War, after all. —JUSTIN C.

ENTER THE MATRIX

The common thread throughout all of the Assassin's Creed games is a man named Desmond Miles. Desmond is a modern-day guy descended from members of the Assassin Order. With the help of his computer-savvy allies, Mr. Miles uses a virtual-reality device called the Animus (in its third iteration in Assassin's Creed III) that allows him to experience the lives of past assassins in order to acquire their knowledge and skills. So you're actually playing as Desmond, who is, in a way, playing as his ancestors. Deep.

Wii U

PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT MONTREAL (SINGLE-PLAYER)/UBISOFT ANNECY (MULTIPLAYER)**
RELEASE: **TBA**



This is **Richard**. He knows it's his job to teach his son **Scotty** what this whole gaming thing is about. The age rating helps him **pick the right games**, but being a good dad means he always wants to know more.

That's exactly what the **ESRB's rating summaries** are for.

Search for a game's rating summary at **ESRB.org**.

Rich H.

Lafayette, IN

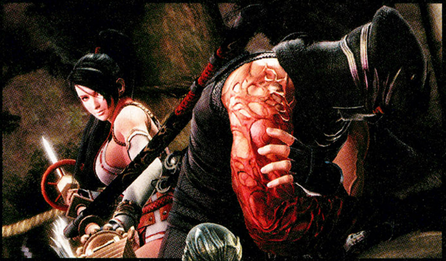
ESRB
ENTERTAINMENT SOFTWARE
RATING BOARD

EARLY CHILDHOOD eC · EVERYONE E · EVERYONE 10+ E 10+ · TEEN T · MATURE 17+ M · ADULTS ONLY 18+ AO
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

NINJA GAIDEN 3: RAZOR'S EDGE

The original video game ninja returns to his roots.

Ryu's arm is infected with evil. Hopefully he won't have to amputate.



TWO DECADES HAVE passed since a Nintendo home console hosted a new Ninja Gaiden. The year was 1991, the machine was 8-bit, and the game was Ninja Gaiden III: The Ancient Ship of Doom. So maybe it's a coincidence—or maybe history has a sense of humor—but another Ninja Gaiden 3 is bringing Ryu Hayabusa back home.

This time the machine is the Wii U, and the game is Ninja Gaiden 3: Razor's Edge. It's a unique new version of the latest in Tecmo's once-dormant, now-very-much-alive 3D action series. And what can we expect from the new version? Well, one thing is certain at this point—there will be blood. Wii U players can expect a very M-rated experience.

Blood is a recurring motif in this game, and not just because Hayabusa has made a profession out of cutting people up with a sword. There's something going on with the man's own blood as well, beginning with a question most players will be asking as soon as they pick up the game: why have the veins in his right arm started flowing with pure, fluid evil?

That's a good question. After a mysterious prologue, the first level opens in London, where a terrorist cell has taken over 10 Downing Street and issued one demand: send in Ryu Hayabusa. No prizes for guessing it's a trap. Inside, an artfully creepy *V for Vendetta*-looking villain does something bizarre to Ryu's sword and the arm that happens to be holding it, while delivering a few cryptic

words about the trail of dead our ninja hero leaves behind him. Later, he also demands tribute from all world governments and the rest of the usual supervillain stuff, but the important part is that he made it personal. Settling the score will take Ryu all over the world, through a very nicely modeled set of international locations.

In gameplay terms, the amateur surgery has made Ryu an even more effective killing machine than he used to be. Vicious new linking combos are very good for clearing out a crowd. They join an already-impressive array of moves—Ryu can run along walls, slide through low gaps, spike his way to high places with a pair of kunai, drop from great heights onto unsuspecting bad guys, and pick up a few extra weapons to supplement the old sword. An auto-aiming bow is nice for dropping pesky snipers. Not least among the arsenal is Ryu's classic wall jump, a throwback to his 8-bit days, which is handy for bouncing up narrow spaces or quickly getting out of a corner.

Ninja Gaiden 3's development was overshadowed a touch by the departure of Team Ninja's rock-star boss, Tomonobu Itagaki. What his absence means in the big picture is up for debate, but it is apparent in some funny little ways—for one thing, his taste for an abrasive joke is missing. In the first rebooted Ninja Gaiden, Itagaki mocked players who preferred an easy difficulty level by demoting them to the "Ninja Dog" rating. This game, on the other hand, diplomatically labels the easy level "Hero," as in "If you want to be the hero without wearing your thumbs to the bone."

Hardcore types may miss the pleasant feeling of superiority, but we suspect the greater mass of gamers would just as soon not suffer insult with their injury. Even at the Hero level, the game takes some effort, and there's value in learning how to dish out combos properly. Team Ninja's 3D-fighter roots show in the move set, which manages to get a massive tree of connecting attacks out of minimal player input. It's more efficient to plan real tactics instead of just wailing on the "quick slash" button, and the more-complex attacks look much, much cooler.

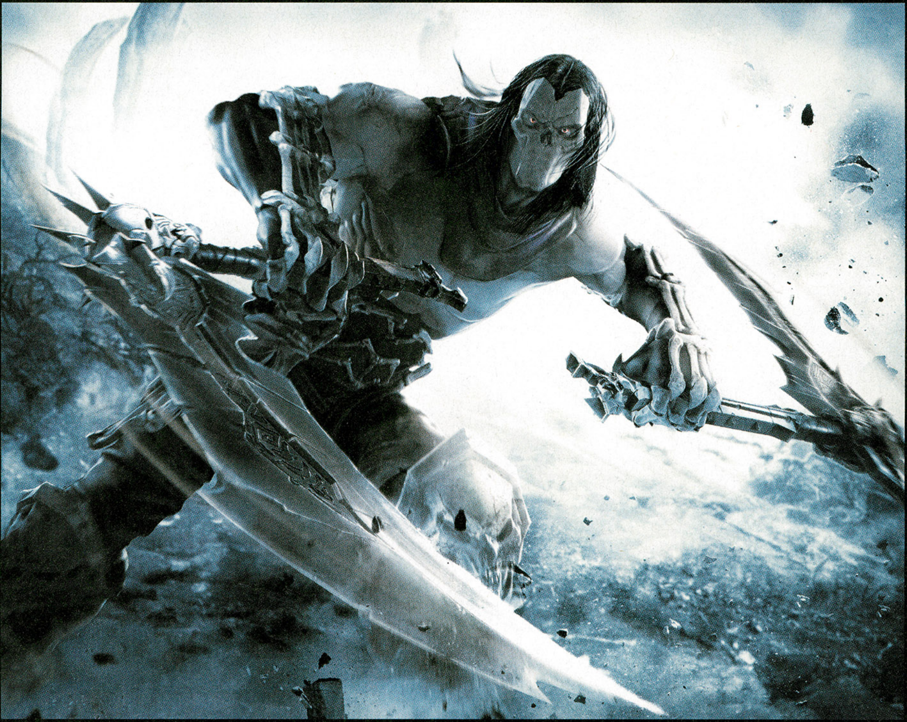
It's fun to be a video game ninja, it's more fun to look good doing it, and the new 3D Ninja Gaidens have let us do plenty of both. Nintendo-console owners have had to wait a while to join the party, but with Tecmo Koei talking about releasing Razor's Edge within the year, it looks like there isn't much more waiting left. —**DAVID S.**

Wii U

PUBLISHER: TECMO KOEI
DEVELOPER: TEAM NINJA
RELEASE: TBA

Ryu may have weapons such as claws and a scythe in his arsenal, but he knows that he can always rely upon his trusty katana.

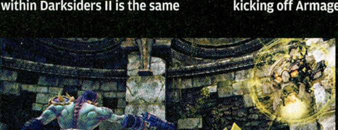
SCREENSHOTS MAY NOT REPRESENT FINAL Wii U VERSION OF THE GAME.



DARKSIDERS II

Death gets a helping hand.

IT MAY HAVE "II" in its title, but Darksiders II isn't a sequel in the traditional sense: the time period within Darksiders II is the same as that of its M-rated predecessor. See, War, one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, is accused of kicking off Armageddon prematurely. The first Darksiders centered on War's adventure to prove his innocence; the second is about Death trying to clear War's name.



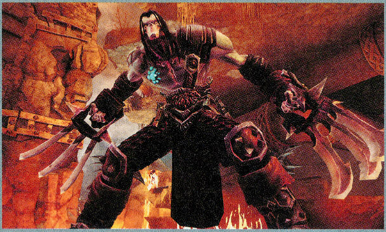
In order to accomplish this task, Death—as portrayed by gravelly-voiced actor Michael Wincott (*Alien: Resurrection; The Crow*)—must journey across the land, traversing a number of ancient ruins along the way. One such locale is the Foundry (the focus of THQ's latest presentation for the game), a stone- and lava-filled area in which an enormous statue being referred to as a Guardian lays dormant. Only Guardians can open the path to the Tree of Life, so Death needs to rouse this Guardian with three Heart Stones that are

scattered throughout the Foundry. Obtaining the stones won't be a cakewalk, of course; the dungeon is infested with creatures that have been tainted by an evil force called Corruption. Fortunately, Death has a hammer-swinging ally named Karn by his side. Not only can Karn help dispatch baddies, but he can also hold open enormous gates and toss the horseman across chasms.

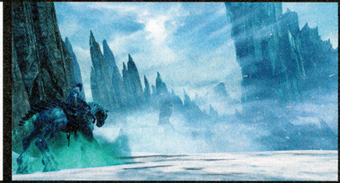
The only barriers that Death can't surmount by himself—he can run, jump, and wall-run past most things—or with Karn's assistance are lava and yellow Corruption crystals, both of which block some routes. (The grim reaper can destroy Corruption crystals with bombs, but the explosives spawn only from certain outcroppings.) Luckily, Death can drive Maker Custodians—giant mechs that can punch through Corruption crystals and foes alike, and have no problems rolling over molten rock. Maker Custodians also have arms like the Hookshot from The Legend of Zelda; Death can shoot the chain-tethered appendage at specific grappling points and then use the chain as a bridge. Speaking of grappling hooks, Death acquires the Death Grip ability as he ventures deeper into the dungeon. With this skill, he can throw out a ghostlike hand, allowing him to grasp objects (such as beams, hoops, and bombs) that would be

ARMED AND DEADLY

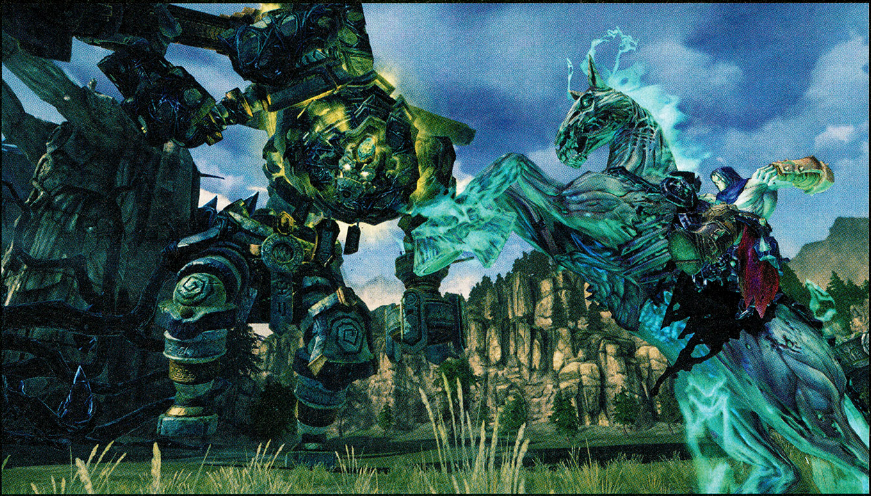
Scythes are Death's primary means of executing enemies, but he has access to seven types of secondary weapons: axes, bucklers, claws, hammers, maces, polearms, and tonfas. These armaments have their pros and cons—claws are quick but weak, for example, whereas hammers are slow but strong—so it behooves you to test them out and find the weapons that suit your particular play style.

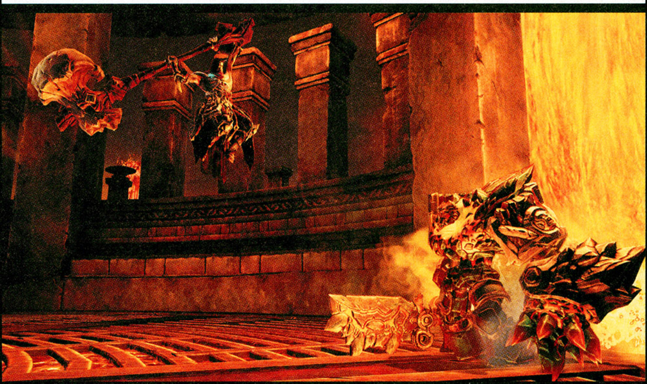


[Right] The world of Darksiders II is simply massive. It's a good thing Death has a horse to make travel easier.



SCREENSHOTS MAY NOT REPRESENT FINAL Wii U VERSION OF THE GAME.





[Above] It's hard to tell from this perspective, but the corrupted Guardian is *huge*. [Below] It's clobberin' time!

out of reach otherwise.

With all of these tools at his disposal, the pale rider figures out ways to reach the Heart Stones. Things don't always go according to plan, however; the third Heart Stone is in a Corruption-polluted room. The Corruption consumes the Maker Custodian that Death brought along, forcing him to face off against his former ride. (Karn can't lend a hand, as he's locked out of the battleground.) After a grueling fight, the mech is defeated and Death has Karn tote the final Heart Stone back to the Guardian. Unfortunately, the stone itself is corrupted and transforms the Guardian into a colossus of destruction.

Our demo then jumps ahead a bit to Death's confrontation with the Corruption-contaminated Guardian in an open field. Atop his steed, Despair, Death rides around the titanic boss and shoots its weak points. Once he has access to a vulnerable Heart Stone, the pale rider uses his Death Grip to pull himself onto it and proceeds to hack away at the stone with his scythes until it breaks. Ultimately, he has to destroy all three stones before the battle can draw to a close.

The demonstration felt like it comprised a significant chunk of Darksiders II, but it was just the final dungeon in the first of the game's four zones (roughly six hours into the adventure, we were told). Clearly, this is going to be a massive game, and if the level of epicness we've already witnessed can be sustained, Darksiders II might just be one of our most anticipated Wii U launch titles.

—JUSTIN C.

Wii U

PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: VIGIL GAMES
RELEASE: TBA

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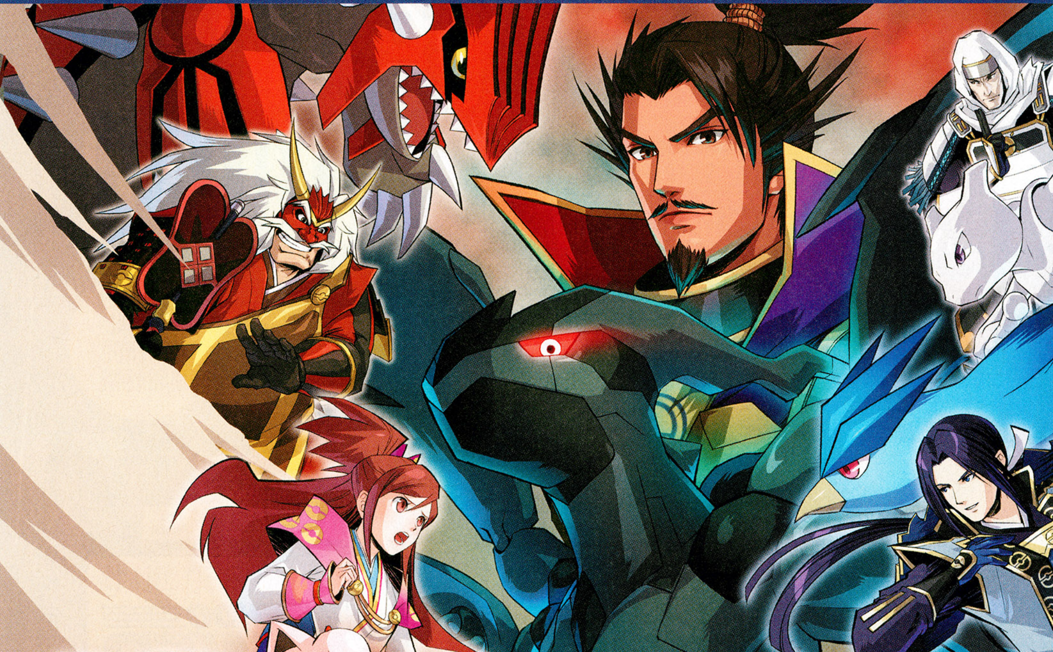
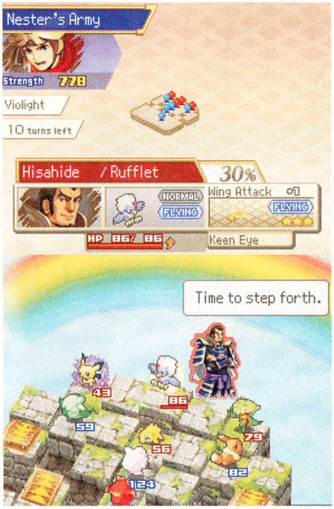


THE WARRIOR WITHIN

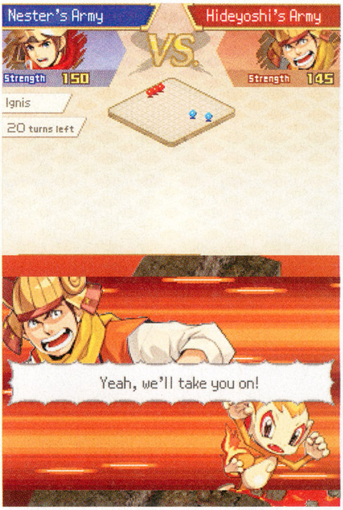
A wild Nobunaga appears! Our favorite Pokémon team up with feudal Japanese Warlords in Pokémon Conquest.

BY CAROLYN GUDMUNDSON

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO** DEVELOPER: **TECMO KOEI** RELEASE: **JUNE 2012** **DS**


Nester's Army
Strength 778
Violight
10 turns left
Hisahide / Rufflet
30%
NORMAL
FLYING
Wing Attack
FLYING
HP 86/ 86
Keen Eye
43
86
59
79
56
82
124

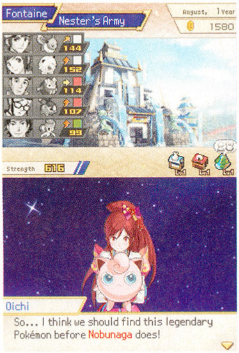
Time to step forth.


Nester's Army
VS.
Hideyoshi's Army
Strength 150
Strength 145
Ignis
20 turns left

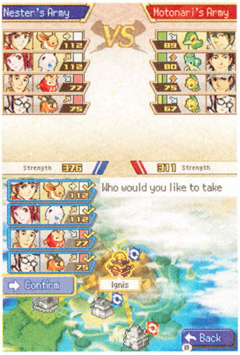
Yeah, we'll take you on!

Stranger crossovers may have happened before, but we're hard-pressed to think of one that took us by surprise as much as Pokémon Conquest, which pairs the feudal warlords of Nobunaga's Ambition with the collectible creatures of the Pokémon series. In spin-offs ranging from Pokémon Pinball to Pokémon Snap, Pokémon has tackled its fair share of genres over the years, but this marks the first strategy RPG for Pikachu and company. Like Nobunaga himself, we're feeling the excitement of venturing into new territory.

Nobunaga's Ambition is one of the oldest and most prolific strategy-RPG franchises, and its characters and settings are loosely based on actual people and places from the Sengoku period of feudal Japan.


Fontaine
Nester's Army
August, 1 Year
1580
144
152
114
107
99
Strength 616
Lv1
Lv1
Lv1
Oichi

So... I think we should find this legendary Pokémon before Nobunaga does!


Nester's Army
VS
Motonari's Army
112
112
77
75
89
80
75
67
Strength 376
311 Strength
112
112
77
75
Confirm
Ignis
Back

Who would you like to take

A series known for its portrayal of historical Japanese Warlords may seem like an odd fit for the fantastical world of Pokémon, but once you start playing, it becomes obvious how perfectly the two go together.

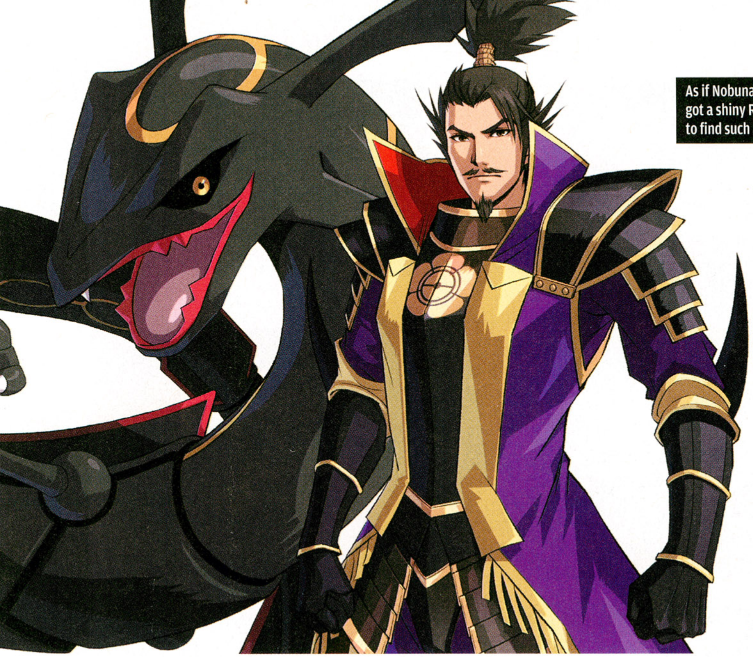
Instead of playing as a famous figure like in the Nobunaga games, in Pokémon Conquest you assume the role of an untested young Warlord (and as in the main Pokémon series, you can pick a girl or a boy) who sets out to defeat the lord Nobunaga in a quest to conquer all 17 of the Ransei region's kingdoms. Legend has it that if a Warrior manages to gain control of the entire region, a Legendary Pokémon will reveal itself to that person.

Of course, that means you're not the only one vying for supremacy; every Warrior with a Pokémon at his side has the same goal in mind. Even the local Warlords of each kingdom are hungry for control of Ransei, so they won't join your side without a fight. But it will take a unified front to defeat Nobunaga, who won't stop until his reign is total.

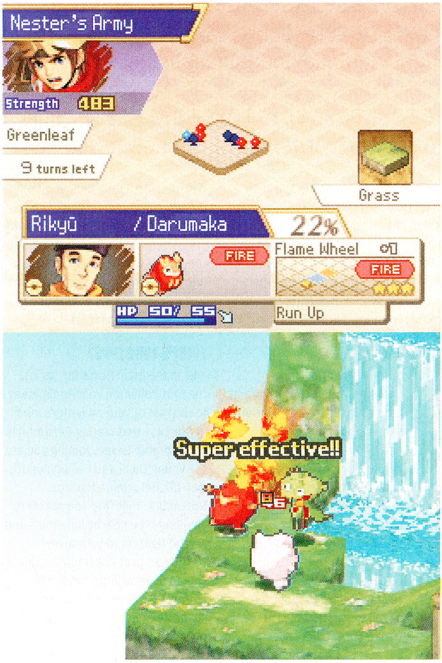
WHAT'S YOUR TYPE?

Like in the main Pokémon series, the first Pokémon you obtain is key to the rest of your adventure, and in this case that starter Pokémon is the adorable Eevee. Joining you are the young Oichi and her Jigglypuff, who are determined to stop Nobunaga. Together you set off to challenge the nearby kingdoms and recruit fighters to your army.

The basics of Pokémon Conquest should be familiar to those who have played other turn-based strategy games. Battles take place on a grid-based map, where teams take turns moving units and attack-



As if Nobunaga wasn't formidable enough, now he's got a shiny Rayquaza. Where on Ransei did he manage to find such a rare Pokémon?



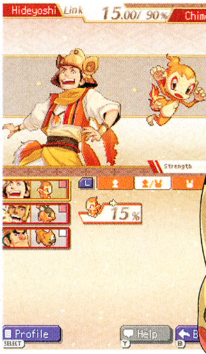
ing. Each Pokémon belongs to a Warrior, but since you're in charge, you directly control the Pokémon of each of your allies. Only six Pokémon may join you in battle at a time, so choosing the right team for each matchup is crucial.

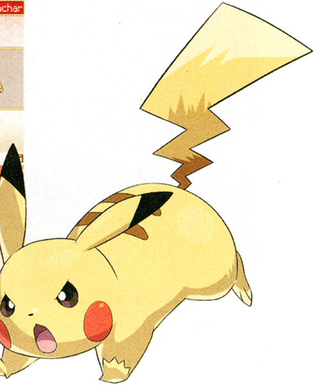
Pokémon have three basic stats: attack, defense, and speed. Battles seem simple at first, because at the core they're all about moving close enough to your enemy to strike, and unlike in other Pokémon games, each Pokémon here has only one attack move. The strategy becomes more complex as you build up your roster of Pokémon and experiment with different Pokémon's offensive capabilities, which vary from single-square melee strikes such as Quick Attack to elemental moves like Vine Whip capable of hitting multiple adversaries.

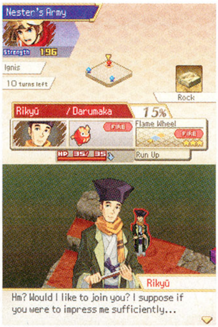
Aside from a primary attack, each Pokémon also has a passive ability that activates under certain circumstances. Eevee's Celebrate ability, for example, allows it to take another turn after knocking out an opponent. The combination of attack and ability makes it impossible to judge a Pokémon by stats alone—Pokémon that may look rather unimpressive at first glance often prove to be indispensible later on.

Warriors aren't without their own talents; each has a skill that can be used once per battle. Oichi's Sweet Song skill restores health to all allies on the field, which can quickly turn the tide of battle when you're in a tight spot. Many of these skills offer huge support boosts to your army, so keeping track of which Warrior is associated with each Pokémon is important. Warriors can also equip items such as Potions to aid their Pokémon in a pinch. Unlike in the main series, though, spamming healing items is out of the question here because you're limited in how many items you can carry into battle; we quickly learned to choose wisely.

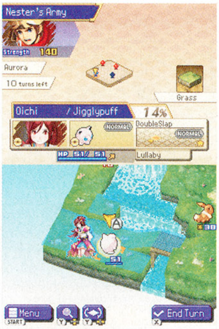
Pokémon type strengths and weaknesses factor into battle in a



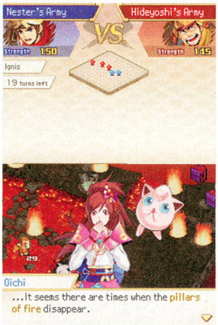



Nester's Army
Strength 196
Ignis
10 turns left
Rock
Rikyū / Darumaka 15%
FIRE
Flame Wheel
FIRE
HP 35/ 35
Run Up
Rikyū

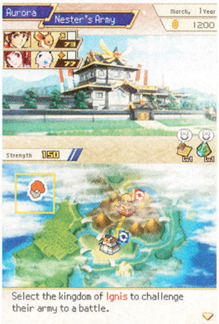
Hm? Would I like to join you? I suppose if you were to impress me sufficiently...


Nester's Army
Strength 140
Aurora
10 turns left
Grass
Oichi / Jigglypuff 14%
NORMAL
DoubleSlap
NORMAL
HP 51/ 51
Lullaby
38
51
Menu
START
End Turn

[Below, left] The terrain can be just as treacherous as your enemies. Grass-type Pokémon should be extra cautious of Fire-type obstacles.


Nester's Army
Hideyoshi's Army
VS.
Strength 150
Strength 145
Ignis
19 turns left
29
Oichi

...It seems there are times when the pillars of fire disappear.


Aurora
Nester's Army
March, 1 Year
1200
73
77
Strength 150
Lv1
Lv1

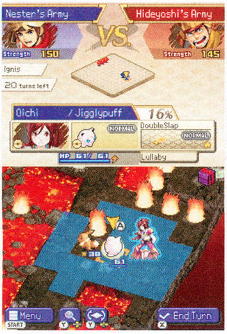
Select the kingdom of Ignis to challenge their army to a battle.

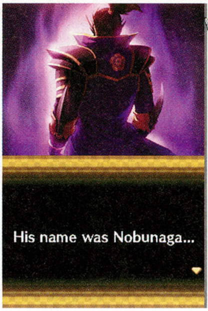
major way, not only with regard to which Pokémon do most damage to each other, but also in terms of the dangers of each map's terrain. Much like the Gyms of the main Pokémon series, each kingdom has a specific type theme—Water, Poison, and so on—that is reflected in the enemy's Pokémon as well as in the environment itself. In the kingdom dominated by Rock-types, for example, Flying- and Fire-type Pokémon take extra damage from hazards such as rolling boulders.

Conditions for victory vary from kingdom to kingdom, too; some battles are merely a matter of defeating all foes, whereas others require you to capture banners scattered across the map and hold them for a set number of turns. Each map we encountered had its own unique challenges that affected the battle. For instance, the Fighting-type arena has a raised square in the center, reminiscent of a boxing ring. Pokémon standing on the edge of the square can be knocked off by an opponent, forcing a long trek back up the ramp to the top. Of course, each of the map's banners are along the edges of the ring, making them difficult to guard.

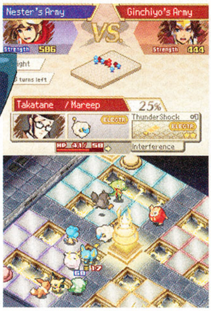
If you meet certain conditions while battling another Warrior, such as defeating their Pokémon in less than four turns or by using a supereffective move, that Warrior will want to join your side and will become available to recruit after you win the battle. Forming a well-balanced group with Pokémon of all types is necessary to be prepared for whatever challenges each kingdom might present, so acquiring new recruits is always a good thing.

To form an unstoppable army you'll have to do more than that, though. It takes a lot of training to make your allies more powerful. A Pokémon's strength is measured by how much it has linked with its Warrior, and the more you use each Pokémon, the closer it will feel to its partner. Only when the link between Warrior and Pokémon reaches 100% can your Pokémon reach its full potential.


Nester's Army
Hideyoshi's Army
VS.
Strength 150
Strength 145
Ignis
20 turns left
Oichi / Jigglypuff 16%
NORMAL
DoubleSlap
NORMAL
HP 61/ 61
Lullaby
38
61
Menu
START
End Turn

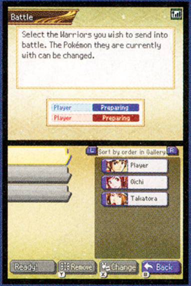


His name was Nobunaga...


Nester's Army
Ginchiyo's Army
VS.
Strength 586
Strength 444
Takatane / Mareep 25%
ELECTR
ThunderShock
ELECTR
HP 41/ 58
Interference
17
68

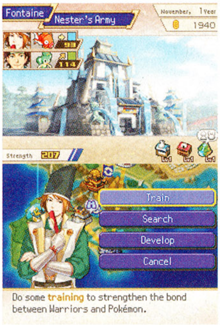
FRIENDLY RIVALRY

When you want to take a break from the main quest, nothing beats challenging a friend to a fierce competition. Train and refine your dream team of Pokémon and battle in six-on-six skirmishes via local wireless or Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection.

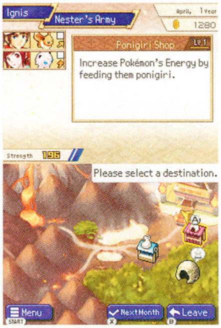

Battle
Player Preparing
Player Preparing
Sort by order in Gallery
Player
Oichi
Takatora
Ready!
Remove
Change
Back

Select the Warriors you wish to send into battle. The Pokémon they are currently with can be changed.

Greenleaf
Player's Army
Player's Army
VS.
Strength 966
Strength 966
15 turns


Fontaine
Nester's Army
November, 1 Year
1940
Strength 207
Train
Search
Develop
Cancel

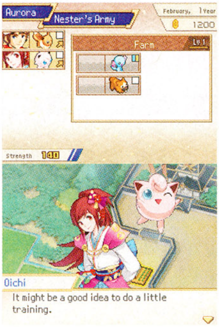
Do some training to strengthen the bond between Warriors and Pokémon.


Ignis
Nester's Army
April, 1 Year
1280
Ponigiri Shop
Lv1
Strength 196
Menu
NextMonth
Leave

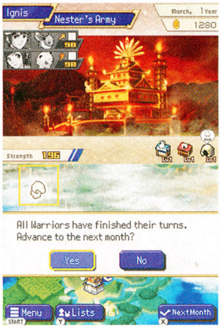
Increase Pokémon's Energy by feeding them ponigiri.

Please select a destination.

[Above, left] Delegated Warriors bring in their earnings once per month, and you can move the in-game clock forward any time.


Aurora
Nester's Army
February, 1 Year
1200
Farm
Lv1
Strength 140

Oichi
It might be a good idea to do a little training.


Ignis
Nester's Army
March, 1 Year
1280
Strength 196
Yes
No
Menu
Lists
NextMonth

All Warriors have finished their turns. Advance to the next month?

BEYOND THE BATTLEFIELD

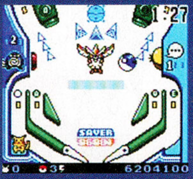
As in the games from the mainline Nobunaga's Ambition series, strategy isn't necessary only on the battlefield; preparing for combat and managing resources are just as important as the battles themselves.

Each kingdom you've conquered offers unique attractions when you return as its Warlord; you'll find item shops and training areas that help you fortify your forces. Pokémon fans will recognize many of the items available for sale, including wristbands to increase Attack stats, and medicines like Awakening to cure the Sleep condition. Special shops also sell items called Ponigiri that increase Pokémon energy levels, which affects the Pokémon's overall performance in battle. (Pokémon can also regain energy by sitting out of battle for awhile, but you can't always afford to bench your star combatants.) How you spend your gold can make or break your team's ability to function at peak performance.

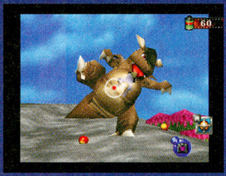
It's also essential to spend time in your own domain for the purposes of recouping and leveling up your Pokémon when faced with an enemy that's stronger than your army. Various maps in each kingdom give you the chance to train your Pokémon as well as recruit any wandering Warriors you come across. From the main map screen, you can check the strength of unconquered kingdoms by selecting the area to view its info. If the rival Warlord's force is greater than your own, it's best to keep training until you're ready.

POKÉMON SPIN-OFF HALL OF FAME

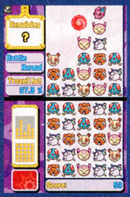
The Pokémon series has a history of great spin-offs—here are some of our favorites.


1:27
SAVER
6204100

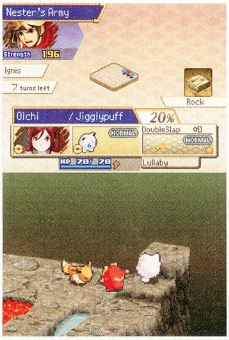
Pokémon Pinball (Game Boy Color)
This pinball title featured a red table and a blue table, each with different components, and had a cool rumble pack built into the cartridge.

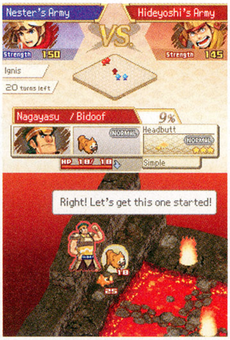


Pokémon Snap (N64)
This on-rails shooter tasks you with snapping photos of each Pokémon rather than capturing them in Poké Balls.



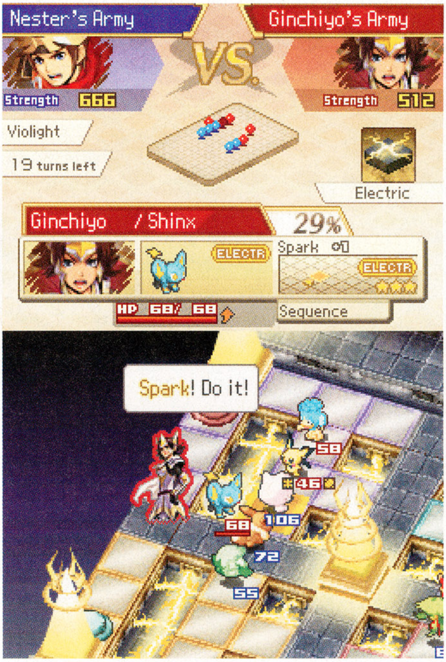
Pokémon Trozei! (Nintendo DS)
A treat for puzzle fans, this game's fast-paced tile-swapping action is similar to Yoshi's Cookie for NES.


Nester's Army
Strength 196
Ignis
7 turns left
Rock
Oichi / Jigglypuff
20%
NORMAL
DoubleSlap
NORMAL
HP 78/ 78
Lullaby


Nester's Army
Hideyoshi's Army
VS.
Strength 150
Strength 145
Ignis
20 turns left
Nagayasu / Bidoof
9%
NORMAL
Headbutt
NORMAL
HP 18/ 18
Simple
18
25

Right! Let's get this one started!

[Above, right] Ignis's fiery arena features hot springs in which you can heal your Pokémon mid-battle.


Nester's Army
Ginchiyo's Army
VS.
Strength 666
Strength 512
Violight
19 turns left
Electric
Ginchiyo / Shinx
29%
ELECTR
Spark
ELECTR
HP 68/ 68
Sequence
58
46
68
106
72
55

Spark! Do it!

What's more, Warriors can take multiple Pokémon under their wings by linking with wild Pokémon encountered in your territory. During battle, a wild Pokémon will display a link symbol that means it's available for capture. Instead of attacking, you can approach it and initiate a rhythm-based linking minigame in which you must hit the A Button in time with the onscreen prompts to successfully obtain the Pokémon. Different Pokémon can be found in each kingdom, so it's worth your while to explore thoroughly to find them all.

It bears noting that once you've conquered a kingdom, you'll need to work to keep it under your control, as well. Unguarded territory is vulnerable, so you must assign recruits to guard it against recapture attempts. Luckily, recruits don't just twiddle their thumbs while they wait to be attacked. You can delegate Warriors to rule in your place by asking them to train (to level up your Pokémon), search (to acquire new recruits), or develop (to gain gold to spend in shops and increase Pokémon energy). This way, you can strengthen your Pokémon and the resources of your realm without lifting a finger.

NEW AND OLD

Like any good crossover, Pokémon Conquest features a balanced mix of new and familiar. The guts of the game are unlike anything we've seen in the Pokémon franchise, but plenty of fan service and nods to the series make it still feel like a Pokémon title. Pokémon from every previous game, including the new ones from Pokémon Black Version and White Version, are present, and they even make their distinctive cry sounds on the battlefield. Despite what a departure Pokémon Conquest is from the series norm, it's clear that developer Tecmo Koei did its homework to be faithful to Game Freak's legacy of Pokémon games.

Lots of graphical touches really make the battles come to life, too, which is especially noteworthy because grid-based systems sometimes feel a bit clinical. When a Pokémon attacks, the camera swings around to show the action from all angles, giving you a zoomed-in look at your opponent's demise. The art styles of the Pokémon and Nobunaga's Ambition franchises are quite different, but subtle tweaks make the two blend seamlessly, and the 2D art during the dialogue scenes is gorgeously detailed. Seeing the legendary Pokémon Zekrom looming menacingly next to the intimidating Nobunaga somehow looks completely natural, as does seeing Jigglypuff float alongside the cheery Oichi.

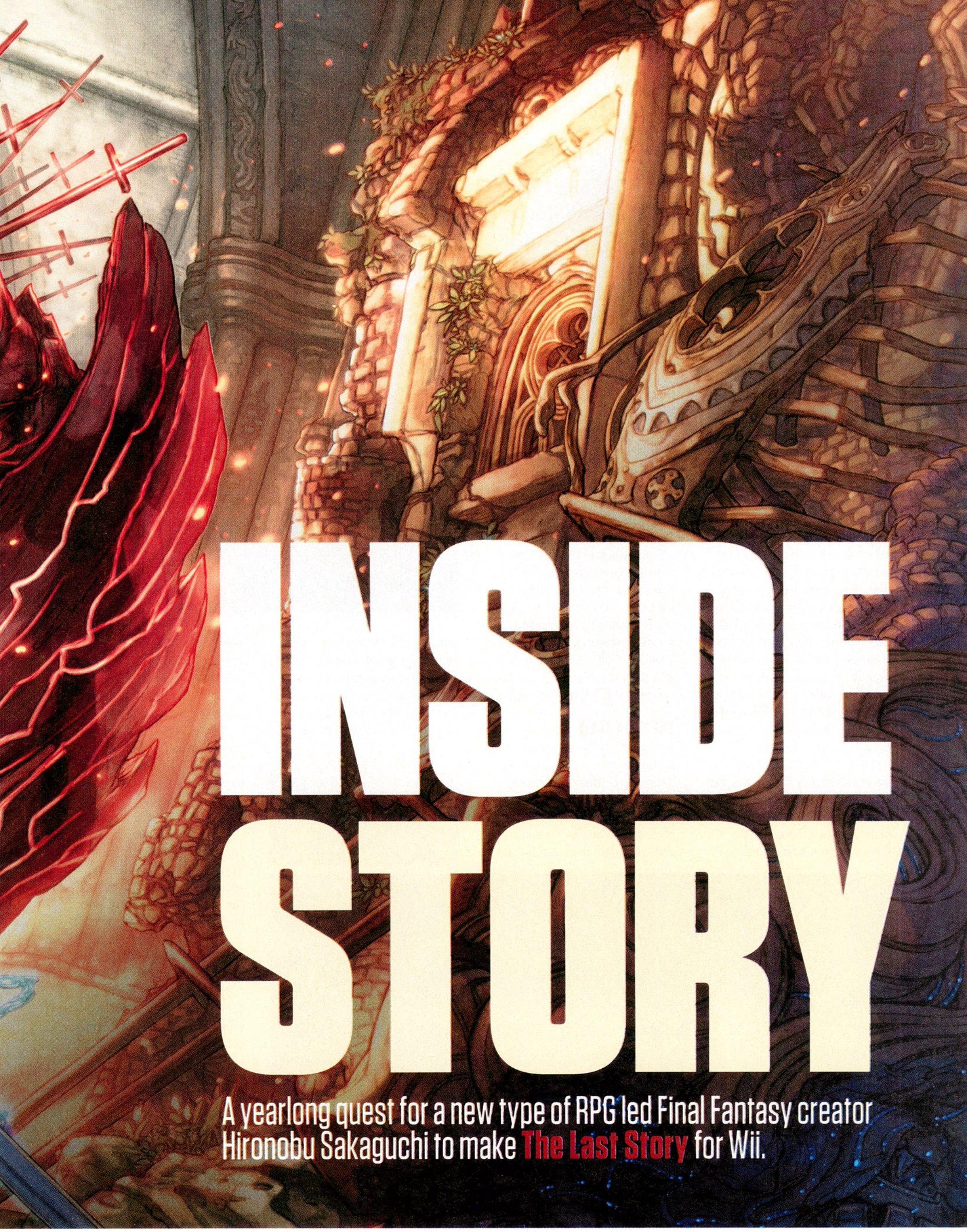
Making a spin-off that appeals to fans of both Pokémon and Nobunaga's Ambition is a tall order, but it looks like Pokémon Conquest might just pull it off. Plus, the difficulty level seems to strike a good balance between being simple enough that young players should be able to pick it up, but deep enough to engage older fans. And even if you're neither a Pokémon devotee nor a Nobunaga's Ambition follower, there's no need to worry; because Pokémon Conquest is such a dramatically different take on both series, prior knowledge doesn't necessarily constitute a leg up.

It's exciting to see such a thorough re-imagining of the Pokémon franchise. Pokémon Conquest wasn't something we knew we wanted until it actually existed, but now that it does, we couldn't be happier that it's getting a US release this June.

BY **CASEY LOE**

PUBLISHER: **XSEED** DEVELOPER: **MISTWALKER** RELEASE: **SUMMER 2012**

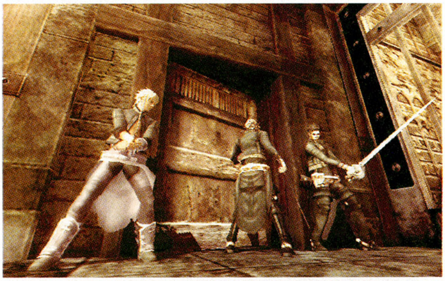
Wii



INSIDE STORY

A yearlong quest for a new type of RPG led Final Fantasy creator Hironobu Sakaguchi to make **The Last Story** for Wii.

After leaving Square Enix to start his Mistwalker development studio, Hironobu Sakaguchi found himself feeling a little out of step with the times. Mistwalker's games had been fairly well received by critics, but most achieved only middling sales success. In particular, they weren't resonating with Western audiences. It was time to try something new.



[Above] Instead of an auto-map, the body language of your companions will point the way to the next destination.

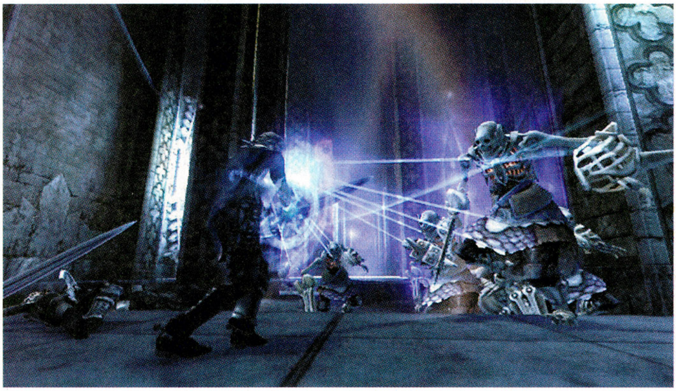
"Just as we were thinking about creating a 'new type of RPG,' I had an opportunity to talk with [Shinji] Hatano of Nintendo," recalled Sakaguchi. "He liked what he heard and agreed with the vision of what we were trying to create.... He understood that creating something new would require some time for research and would have unknown risks." So with Nintendo's blessing, Sakaguchi's team spent a full year on research and development, forging a dramatically different RPG battle system through continuous cycles of trial and error. The chance to craft something novel through lengthy experimentation was a luxury that Sakaguchi hadn't enjoyed since his work on Final Fantasy VII, when his famous series made the difficult jump from 2D to 3D visuals.

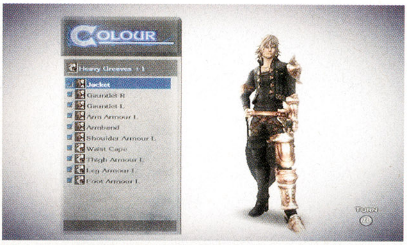
This time the goal was to make a leap from the turn-based gameplay of his past titles to a new style of real-time combat. While the bones of the idea were there from the start, Sakaguchi's team spent the year experimenting with a variety of prototypes, creating new mechanics as needed, and churning through ideas that just didn't fit. In the end, Sakaguchi discarded as many or more mechanics than actually made it into the game. The final result is a battle system that strays so far from the traditional image of JRPG combat that some might question whether The Last Story should be considered a part of the genre at all. "In the end it became a hybrid system with action-based and simulation-based elements," explains Sakaguchi. "But the original intention of creating a 'new type of RPG' lies strongly at its core, so I decided it was still within the genre."

THE "I" IN TEAM

Most strikingly, The Last Story refuses to observe the typical RPG distinction between exploration and combat. Dungeons are laid out action game-style, as a linear series of rooms. You and your teammates sweep through them like some sort of medieval SWAT team, bursting into each area with weapons drawn and, when the coast is clear, taking defensive positions outside of the door to the next area. Boulders and rubble provide cover to hide behind, and you can sneak along walls to approach doorways without being noticed. At times the game feels like a cover-based shooter or a stealth-action title.

When you do spot an enemy, you can either charge in with swords and spells blazing, or take cover and approach the situation more strategically. Drawing your crossbow will allow you to scan the environment from a first-person perspective, and you may spot something that you can interact with: perhaps a rock formation that could be brought down onto an enemy's head with a well-placed magic spell. And of course you can fire crossbow bolts—powerful ones to snipe a particularly dangerous foe, or weak shots designed not to deal damage, but to get a foe's attention and lure him into an ambush. In the heat of combat, The Last Story plays like a simplified character-action game. Hero Zael performs combos automatically, targeting whatever foe you're pointing at. It's up to you to switch targets to take out vulnerable foes, or adopt a blocking stance and perform dodge rolls when Zael gets in over his head.

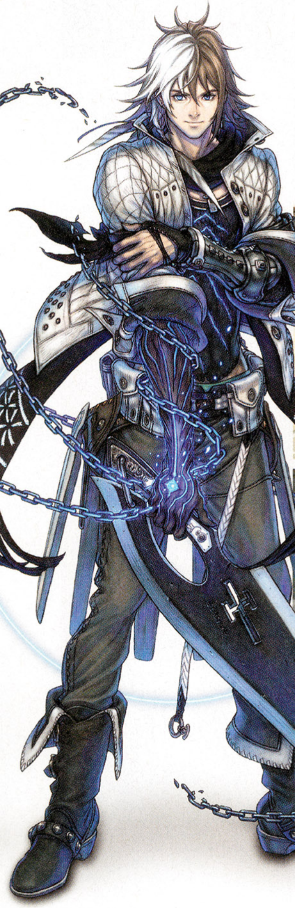


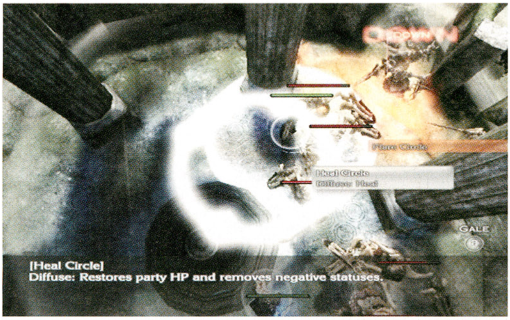


[Above] With a few upgrades and a bottle of dye, you can be the most stylishly asymmetrical mercenary on Lazulis Island.

Many of the finest ideas in The Last Story involve the way Zael manages his party, a rotating cast that can include as many as five other characters. The switch to action-focused combat has left many RPG developers struggling with the question of how to handle party members: when they're too weak, players are frustrated by their uselessness, but when they're too strong, the game is basically just playing against itself. Sakaguchi's team cleverly solved this problem by pairing its hero with party members who make meaningful contributions without usurping the player's leadership role. For example, spellcasters don't cast fireballs at foes—they summon pools of fire onto the battlefield. The player-controlled hero, Zael, can run through these pools to enchant his weapon with the power of flame, or use a special Gale attack to disperse the pools in explosions that damage all nearby foes. Healing and support spells work similarly: Zael can stand in the magic pools to absorb the benefits, or disperse them with his sword for a one-shot effect. Much of Zael's time will be spent protecting his weaker comrades, mostly by using a special power known as Gathering that compels all foes to target him exclusively. Needless to say, you'll take a beating if you use this ability constantly, but it's ideal when you need a spell to be cast without disruption, or you want to pull adversaries away from a wounded comrade.

Between stabbing at foes, disrupting enemy spellcasters, stepping in magic pools, and running to revive fallen comrades, the combat in The Last Story is about as exciting as RPG battles get. But it can also be deeply strategic, especially against the game's well-designed bosses. In those cases, players can enter "Command mode," pausing the game to execute more-complicated tactics by giving each character specific orders. Party members may provide the tools for victory, but it's always the player who has to figure out how to use them.





[Heal Circle]
Diffuse: Restores party HP and removes negative statuses.

[Left] Managing the various pools of magic summoned by both allied and enemy spellcasters can be the key to victory during particularly difficult battles.

DYED IN THE WOOL

Don't expect to see that level of creativity in other aspects of The Last Story's design, however. Its RPG elements are light and very conventional—characters level up and learn new abilities, evolving along a preset path that leaves no room for player customization. There are several different weapons and suits of armor to find in chests or at shops, and you can spend money and a few rare ingredients to upgrade their stats. One cool touch is that each piece of armor has its own unique in-game appearance, and that appearance actually changes as it's upgraded, transforming from, say, a simple leather jerkin and pants into an impressive wall of armor by adding fancy epaulettes, gauntlets, and shin guards piece by piece. Players can also buy and find dyes to customize the colors of their characters' gear. Those who hate wasting time rejiggering equipment will love the simple elegance of the system, in which one character can easily wear the same suit of armor throughout the entire game. But others may miss the excitement of collecting mountains of old-fashioned RPG loot.

The game offers only a single area in which players can explore freely: the hub city of Lazulis Island, which you visit multiple times during your quest. Here you'll find shops that sell a variety of wares,

ELZA
LV11
486
QUARK
LV13
KANAN
LV10
YURIS
MAHAMIA

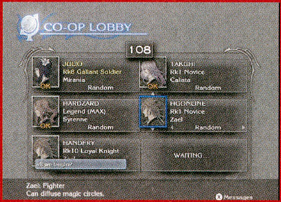
SHARING THE STORY

Drawing inspiration from the action genre, The Last Story features a pair of online modes that allow up to six players to compete for prizes over Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. Weapons and items won in these multiplayer modes will be saved to a game file for use in the single-player campaign.

In the co-op mode, up to six players can ally themselves against one of a handful of bosses exclusive to this mode. Players can select from any of the game's cast of mercenary heroes (in the single-player mode, only Zael is playable), although each character is limited to a single projectile attack and a single special attack.

In the deathmatch mode, players can choose from one of 20 heroes, villains, and campaign-mode NPCs and face off against other player-controlled characters. Once again the characters are restricted to simple move sets, but the battlefields are full of interesting gimmicks and littered with special crossbow bolts and weapons that can be picked up and used against your foes. Players can opt to fight free-for-all or join randomly assigned teams, and all participants win prizes based on their end-of-battle rankings.

Both modes are limited in scope and content, so don't expect anything close to an online experience like that of Monster Hunter Tri. But the online modes do offer a fun diversion from the main quest, and an opportunity to win sweet gear and take the reins of characters other than Zael.



JULIO
Rk8 Gallant Soldier
Mirania
Random

TAKUHI
Rk1 Novice
Calista
Random

HARDZARD
Legend (MAX)
Syrenne
Random

HGONLINE
Rk1 Novice
Zael
Random

HANDERY
Rk10 Loyal Knight

Zael: Fighter
Can diffuse magic circles.

SENTINEL BEAST: ATAR
2240

an arena in which to test your skills, and plenty of townsfolk looking for help with simple tasks. You can communicate with your comrades at the city's tavern, brush up on the region's geopolitics at the castle, and read backstory lore in the royal library. But such diversions make up only a small amount of The Last Story's running time; the game's heart lies on the battlefield, not in elaborate side quests, character customization, or small talk with NPC townsfolk.

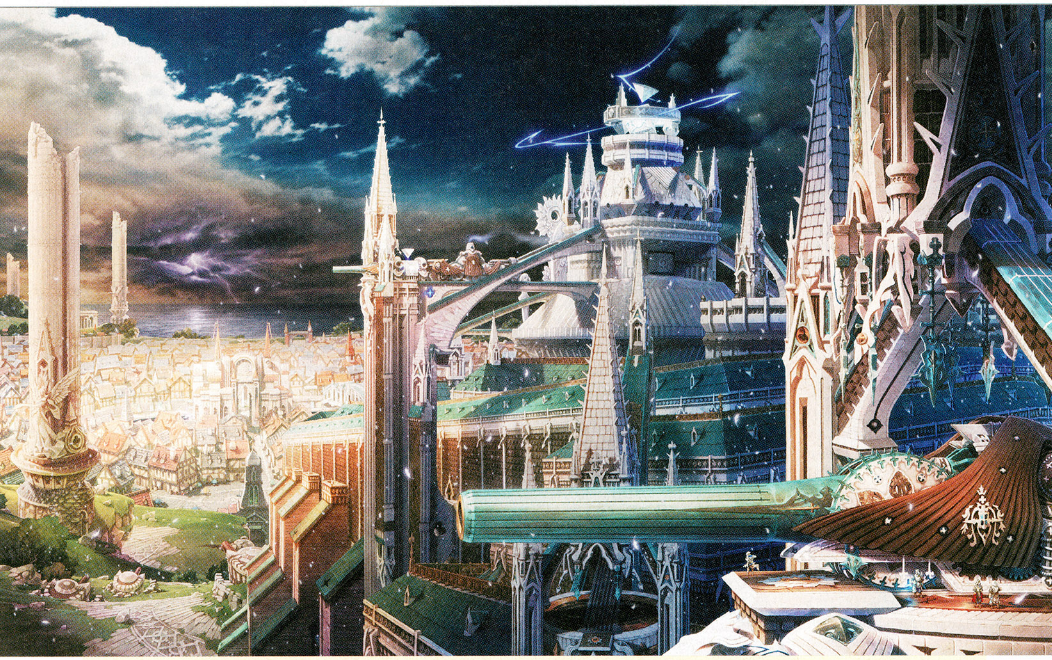
THICK AS THIEVES

With few options for exploration, The Last Story relies on a strong central narrative to pull players from one action scene to the next. At first the story seems to revolve around a romance: hero Zael is a member of a mercenary band hired to provide security at a wedding, which was arranged to forge an alliance between two powerful ruling families. But the bride wants none of it, slips out of the castle, and runs into Zael in a fairy-tale-cute moment. Needless to say, the two form a strong bond that tests their individual loyalties and ultimately threatens the stability of the island. It's a classic tale of troubled love, but surprisingly, Sakaguchi sees a different relationship at the heart of the game.

"It's more of a story of friendship than a love story," Sakaguchi explains, pointing to the mercenary group of which Zael is a member. And indeed, the relationships between the members of the group are a clear highlight of the game. The characters chatter, bicker, and make jokes as they fight their way through each chapter, and the fast-paced narrative makes ample time for optional chapters that explore their backstories and advance their respective agendas. It certainly helps that this may be the most plausible mercenary band in JRPG history—instead of the usual troop of brooding hipsters, scantily clad teenage girls, and heroes with hearts of gold, they're a pack of hard-drinking, hard-partying adults with sharp tongues, traumatic pasts, and a history of antisocial behavior. And considering all of that, their British accents are a pitch-perfect fit. (We kid the Brits! Like Nintendo's other major Japanese RPG project, the recently released Xenoblade Chronicles, The Last Story was localized by Nintendo of Europe, and North American publisher Xseed has made no significant changes to the script or voice acting.)

It's hard not to love The Last Story's band of misfit heroes—which was Sakaguchi's goal all along. As he puts it, "when going into the last scene, I wanted players to feel that these characters were their friends, and to emerge with the sense that they've forged a strong bond with them by finishing an adventure together."

A focus on supporting-cast camaraderie is something else The Last Story shares with Xenoblade Chronicles. But despite both games being embarked upon with similar ambitions of modernizing a dated genre, it's astonishing how little the two titles have in common. Whereas Xenoblade Chronicles focused on building an immense world and a grand mythology, The Last Story centers on a personal saga set on a small but detailed stage. Where Xenoblade Chronicles added layers of mechanical depth, The Last Story pursues elegance and simplicity in its game design. And while Xenoblade Chronicles found inspiration in the freedom of open-world gaming, The Last Story seems modeled after linear action games that offer a controlled and refined experience. Taken as a pair, the games offer a sharply conflicting picture of where RPGs are headed, but do a fantastic job of showing just how diverse and interesting the genre can be when its creators are given the freedom to take big risks.



The Best for “Last”

Hironobu Sakaguchi began his career at Square (now known as Square Enix) making games for Japanese computer platforms, but didn’t find major success until the 1990 release of Final Fantasy on the NES. He designed or directed the six sequels that followed, and continued to produce the series until leaving the company in 2003 to establish a new design studio, Mistwalker. After handling design and/or writing duties for several Xbox 360 and Nintendo DS games, Sakaguchi returned to the director’s chair for the first time since 1992’s Final Fantasy V to helm The Last Story.

NINTENDO POWER In past interviews, you’ve mentioned that early in The Last Story’s development you and your team discussed the differences between what Western and Japanese audiences want from RPGs. In your opinion, what are those differences?

HIRONOBU SAKAGUCHI The main discussion was about battle systems, and I remember mentioning how I think that Western audiences tend to shy away from turn-based systems. Of course, I believe there is a lot of merit and potential left in turn-based battle systems, but I remember talking about what the current audience’s preferences are and about trying to implement more action-based gameplay.

You’ve mentioned that many mechanics were cut from The Last Story. Can you share some of them, and your reasons for abandoning them?

As an example, one of the abandoned mechanics was the “combat-rewind function.” This feature made it so that when a mage’s magic hit an enemy, an icon would appear in the center of the screen to prompt the player to shake the Wii Remote. By shaking the controller at that moment, the battle would rewind to just before the mage cast his spell. The scene would rewind quickly, like rewinding a video, and then play back again from an overhead view. With this feature, players would have been able to see which mage attacked which enemy using what type of magic, and then have a batter understanding of the battlefield conditions. However, even after trying all sorts of different things, the feature slowed the battle tempo too much, and we decided to take it out.

You can still see remnants of this feature in the overheard view while in Command mode, or while watching the Lazulis Knights cheating in the match at the arena.

What were your goals for the online portions of The Last Story? Were they a part of the plan from the beginning?

Online mode was something I wanted to implement from the very start of the project. The main goal was to have both cooperative and competitive modes, so in that sense we were able to fulfill our goal.

How does the experience of managing development teams from afar compare to your past experiences working directly with an in-house team?

Since I was always physically with the development team for the latter half of development, I guess I was really only apart from them for the first half of the project. However, with communication tools such as video-chat conferencing,

[Above] All the toughest mercenaries let their hair do the talking.

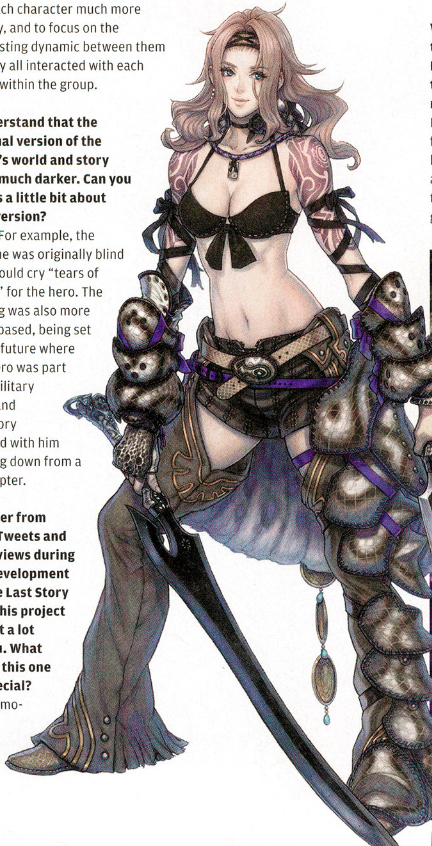
e-mails, and wikis available these days, I don't recall any problems working from afar, as I was always able to stay on top of the situations that emerged.

The Last Story is unusual in that it seems to revolve around more-personal conflicts than an epic, world-in-danger storyline. Why did you decide to go that direction?
I really wanted a chance to flesh out each character much more deeply, and to focus on the interesting dynamic between them as they all interacted with each other within the group.

I understand that the original version of the game's world and story were much darker. Can you tell us a little bit about that version?
Sure. For example, the heroine was originally blind and would cry "tears of blood" for the hero. The setting was also more sci-fi-based, being set in the future where the hero was part of a military unit, and the story started with him coming down from a helicopter.

I gather from your Tweets and interviews during the development of The Last Story that this project meant a lot to you. What made this one so special?
I get emotionally involved in all my games; they are like children to me. I've always loved all of my titles during development and after launch. Ultimately children leave the nest to go off on their own, but I will always be watching over them.

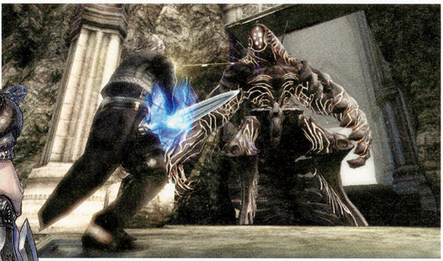
What was the most challenging project of your career? How did the process of making The Last Story compare?
Probably both the original Final Fantasy, and Final Fantasy VII. FFI was our first RPG on the Famicom (NES). FFVII used 3D graphics, which made it a very difficult project, even though we had a year-long research period—just like The Last Story did. [For FFVII], we used a Silicon Graphics machine to create an early test version of the battle system. In that sense, the development method was very similar to The Last Story.

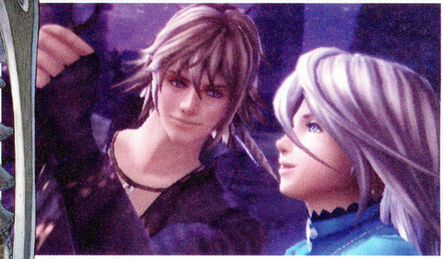


Why was it so important to you that [Final Fantasy composer] Nobuo Uematsu rethink the way that he approached making RPG music for The Last Story?
I wanted the music to flow differently from a traditional RPG's because I didn't think of this title as a traditional RPG, mainly due to the large amount of changes in the game's mechanics, but also due to how some of the conversations were very unusual, such as the dialogue among party members in the cave [at the start of the game].

What aspect of the game's reception in Japan and Europe has been most gratifying? What aspect was most disappointing?
In Japan, many users commented that it didn't offer enough total hours of gameplay. I thought the feedback would be similar for Europe, but many players there said the length was just right. I was surprised to hear this, but at the same time very happy that the game was accepted so well by the European audience.

You've mentioned that Mistwalker is now working on smartphone games. Do you still intend to make large-scale console games like The Last Story in the future?
If the opportunity arises then I would like to create another one. Smartphone games are small-group projects that remind me of when I was creating the first Final Fantasy, so they can be very intimate and fun. Also, with a small group we're able to execute things much more quickly, allowing us to try a variety of ideas and immediately see what works and what's essential to the core enjoyment of the game.





ULTIMATE SUPER Mario

The best game!
The best enemy!
The best power-up!
And more!
It's all covered in our look at the highlights of the **Super Mario** series.

There's no doubt that Mario is the king of video gaming. For more than 25 years, the Super Mario series has been setting standards for imaginative graphics and gameplay while showcasing what Nintendo's hardware can do. More importantly, every Super Mario title is bursting with creative fun that exemplifies the best that gaming has to offer. But which Super Mario game is the greatest? It's not an easy question to answer, but as we did with The Legend of Zelda (back in Vol. 248) and Metroid (in Vol. 259), we've compiled our no-mushrooms-barred rankings of every Super Mario platformer, plus picked out the highlights–including best world, best suit, and best Bowser encounter–from throughout the series. (We're not including spin-offs or other types of Mario games; if we did, we'd never get this magazine done!) From the original Super Mario Bros. to the recently released Super Mario 3D Land, they're all here as part of our celebration of one of gaming's most renowned series.

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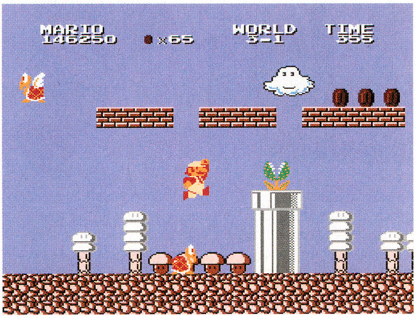
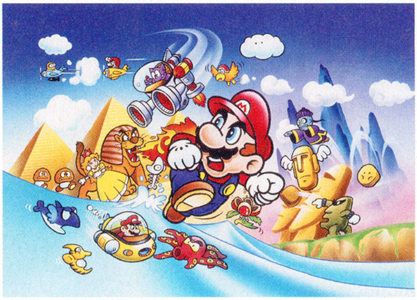
Super Mario Bros.: The Lost Levels

Wii VIRTUAL CONSOLE, 2007

This is the game that was originally released in Japan as Super Mario Bros. 2. Though included in collections such as Super Mario All-Stars and Super Mario Bros. Deluxe, it wasn't until the advent of Virtual Console that Super Mario Bros.: The Lost Levels came to North America as a stand-alone product. And there's a fairly good reason for that: it's infuriatingly difficult and, unlike most games in the series, it doesn't offer tremendous improvements over its predecessor. In fact, its most notable features are deadly Poison Mushrooms and Warp Zones that send you to earlier levels–talk about cruel! It's actually a pretty rewarding game, but the punishing challenge prevents it from ranking higher on the list.

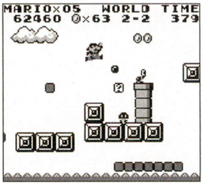


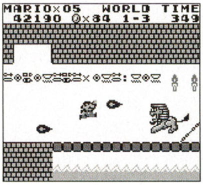


13 Super Mario Land

GAME BOY, 1989

Mario's first outing on the Game Boy was quite popular back in the day because, well, it was Mario's first outing on the Game Boy. That alone helped mask the fact that Super Mario Land has a decidedly un-Mario-ish feel. The odd power-ups, foreign locales, bizarre enemies, and semifrequent vehicle stages are unlike any other Mario adventures. Of course, these peculiarities don't make it a bad game. On the contrary, Super Mario Land is all the more memorable because of them. Despite the differences, the gameplay is just as solid as that of any of the more "mainstream" Mario games. It also doesn't hurt that Super Mario Land contains one of the best soundtracks in the series.





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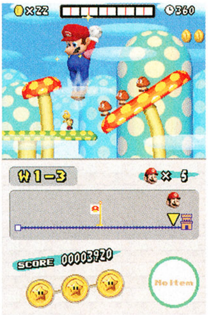
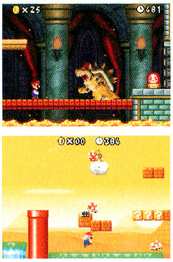




New Super Mario Bros.

NINTENDO DS, 2006

For years it seemed like Mario had left 2D games behind, but he returned to his roots with a vengeance on Nintendo DS. When the Mario brothers reverted to two dimensions it proved there was still huge demand for platformers of old; New SMB became one of the best-selling games of all time thanks to its back-to-basics formula.

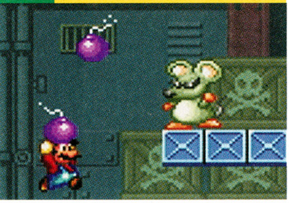
With more than a few nods to the early games, New SMB didn't innovate much, but that wasn't its goal. The game was intended as a callback to a simpler time (even the new power-ups had a simplicity to them) and a reintroduction of the concept of classic 2D side-scrollers—something all gamers should appreciate.

Best Music: Super Mario Bros. Ground Theme

It might not have the sexiest name, but few tunes in video gaming are catchier than the Ground Theme from Super Mario Bros. You know the one we're talking about—you probably just think of it as "the Mario song." Composed by Koji Kondo, the tune is probably the most recognizable bit of music in the history of video gaming, and we'd go so far as to say the Super Mario series might not have achieved such phenomenal acclaim without it.

Best Non-Bowser Boss: Mouser

How do you not love Mouser from Super Mario Bros. 2? He is, after all, a giant rodent who wears sunglasses and has a fascination with explosive devices—a lot more interesting than any of the Koopa variants we've fought over the years. We actually feel a little bad about grabbing the poor guy's own bombs and using them to blow him up.



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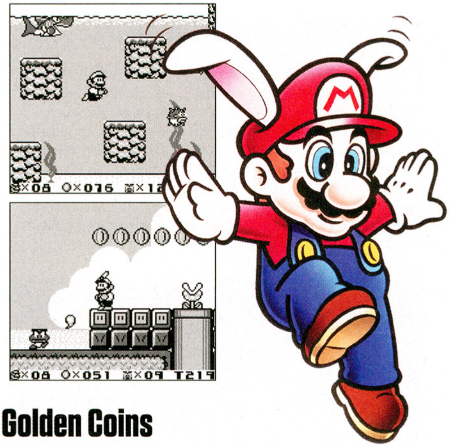
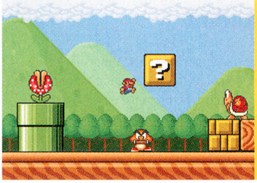


Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins

GAME BOY, 1992

Compared to its unorthodox precursor, Super Mario Land 2 feels more like a traditional Mario title thanks to the return of classic enemies and power-ups, and graphics inspired by Super Mario World. This game was designed to deliver a console-style experience on a portable screen. That's not to say that SML2 simply apes those console games—it brings a few new things to the mix, too. Collecting a carrot gives Mario bunny ears that allow him to hop and slow his descent while falling. More importantly, SML2 introduces a new villain, Wario. This greedy brute proved so popular that he ended up taking over the Super Mario Land series and eventually branched out into multiple games of his own.



Best World: Giant Land (Super Mario Bros. 3)

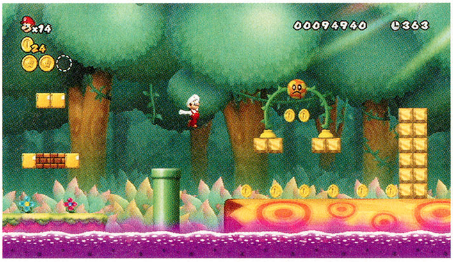
Super Mario Bros. 3 contains a great variety of distinctive themed worlds, but the one that immediately stands out is Giant Land (called Big Island in the more-recent rereleases of the game). There was something novel about entering a world filled with oversized versions of enemies and objects that were so familiar to us. We loved smashing ? Blocks that were four times their normal size, and stomping on massive Goombas and Koopa Troopas made us feel extra powerful.

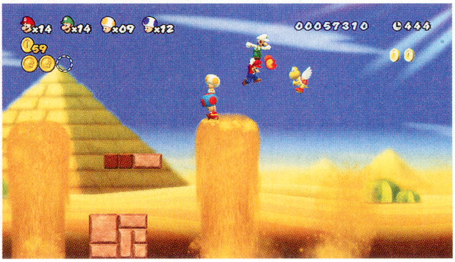
10

New Super Mario Bros. Wii

Wii, 2009

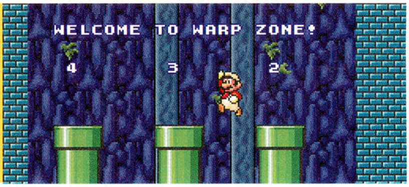
Though it doesn't have the most original title, New Super Mario Bros. Wii brought Mario side-scrollers back to consoles in a big way. With new power-ups like the Penguin and Propeller Suits along with the inclusion of Yoshi and the returning Koopalings, it felt like a lost Mario adventure had been unearthed. It's no surprise it sold tens of millions of copies. Though the game expanded on the concept of New Super Mario Bros. in several ways, it had one small flaw: the four-player co-op could be a chaotically fun distraction, but it didn't really gel with Mario's tradition of precision and tight controls. Still, when played alone or with a second player, New SMB Wii is a throwback for the ages.





Best Secret: Warp Zone

There are so many cool secrets in the Super Mario series that it's hard to choose the single best one. The Minus World from the original SMB is a strong contender, as is the 1-up trick from World 3-1. But few things are more rewarding than discovering a Warp Zone in Super Mario Bros. and getting to zip ahead to an advanced level of the game.



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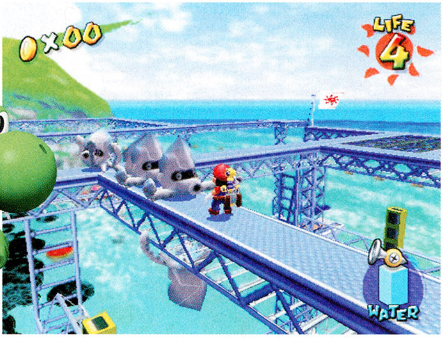
Super Mario Sunshine

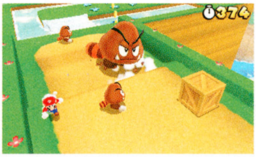
GAMECUBE, 2002

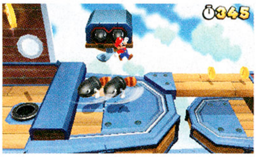
As the follow-up to the groundbreaking Super Mario 64, Super Mario Sunshine had some pretty high expectations to live up to. But Nintendo didn't take the safe and easy route and offer more of the same; on the contrary, though the developers built upon the core 3D platforming of the N64 title, they changed things up significantly when it came to the theme and to Mario's abilities. The tropical paradise of Isle Delfino provides one of the most unique settings in the series, while Mario's water-shooting FLUDD backpack ensures there's a lot more to the action than running and jumping. Perhaps even more shocking—Mario has short sleeves! So how did the changes work out? Well, the game is plenty of fun, but it sometimes it doesn't fully feel like a Mario game. Perhaps it's no surprise that our favorite parts are the stages in which you don't use FLUDD but instead have to rely purely on platforming skill.

Best Bowser Battle: Super Mario 64

As impressive as it was to run around a 3D version of the Mushroom Kingdom in Super Mario 64, the game needed something big to really show off the new polygonal technology. Enter Bowser. We had fought the Koopa king several times before, but never had the battle been as intense as this one. Running around behind the big lug, grabbing his tail, and swinging him in a circle before tossing him into a bomb felt incredible, and it showed us what was possible with 3D gaming.







8

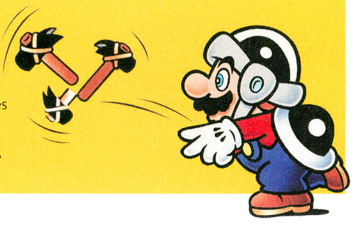
Super Mario 3D Land

NINTENDO 3DS, 2011

After Mario games basically invented 3D platformers and revolutionized the genre a couple of times on consoles, it was fitting that the series's next step was to change 3D adventuring on handhelds too. Super Mario 3D Land brought the series back to basics, taking many cues—including the reappearance of the fan-favorite Tanooki Suit—from Super Mario Bros. 3 and reimagining them in a 3D world. Each colorful stage is a tightly packed journey of fun discovery that melds 2D Mario standards with 3D gameplay. The title is also one of the more visually impressive Nintendo 3DS games and uses the stereoscopic 3D in increasingly inventive ways. The difficulty balance could be a bit better, but as a game meant to be more inviting to casual players turned off by other 3D Mario titles, 3D Land succeeded without sacrificing the series's hallmark killer gameplay.

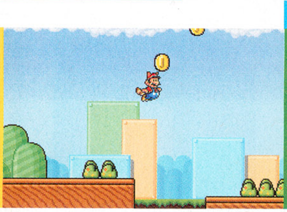
Best Suit: Hammer Suit

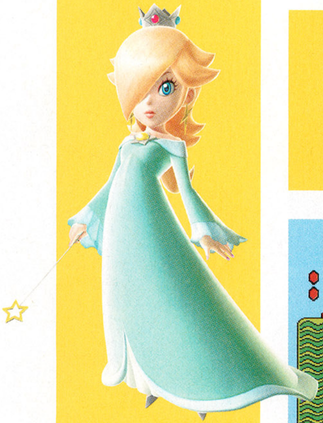
Throughout Super Mario Bros. and Super Mario Bros. 3, players had to contend with those pesky Hammer Bros. and their object-hurling brethren. The hard-to-come-by Hammer Suit in SMB3 allowed players to turn the tables for once. And more than just offering a fun way to defeat enemies and avoid fireballs, the Hammer Suit looks pretty stylish. Even the ruling elite were jealous of how spiffy the outfit looks; if you rescued one of the kings in SMB3 while wearing the suit, the ruler would say to Mario or Luigi, "Hey, you! How about lending me your clothes? No dice?! What a drag."



Best Remake: Super Mario All-Stars

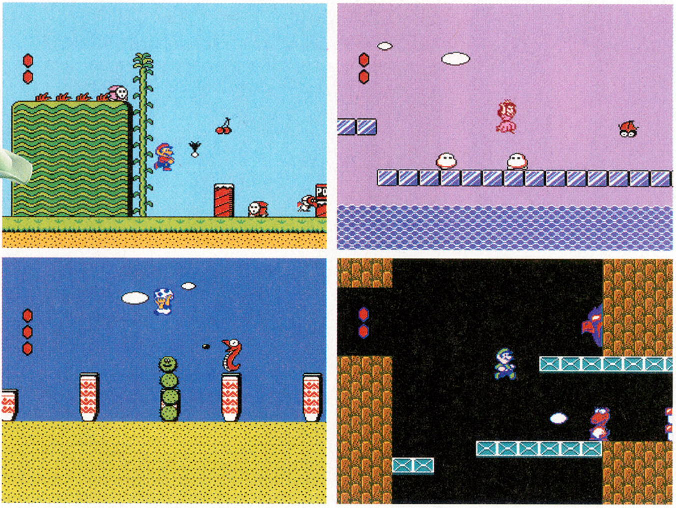
OK, so maybe we're kind of cheating on this one. Considering that it contains graphically enhanced versions of four classic Super Mario games (SMB 1, 2, 3, and The Lost Levels), how could Super Mario All-Stars not be the best Super Mario remake? It's pretty much the ultimate Mario package.





Best Supporting Character: Rosalina

We considered giving this achievement to Yoshi or Peach or Daisy, but the more we thought about the mysterious Rosalina and her poignant backstory from Super Mario Galaxy, the more convinced we were she was deserving of the title. There are a lot of things about the Super Mario series that are fun, but very few that are emotionally powerful; Rosalina is one of them. What? No, we're not tearing up from reading her storybook! We just got, um, Star Bits in our eyes!

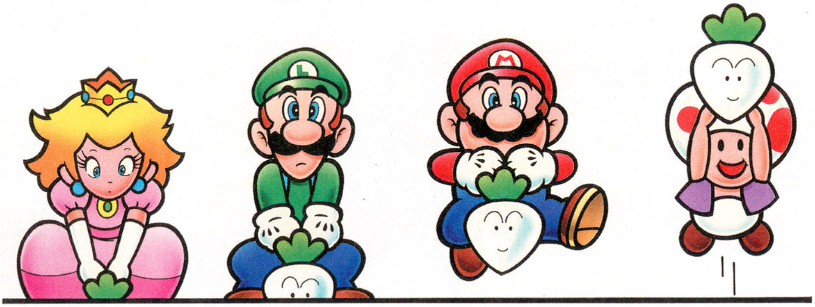


7

Super Mario Bros. 2

NES, 1988

It's a fairly well-known bit of trivia that the US version of Super Mario Bros. 2 is actually a Japanese title called Yume Kojo: Doki Doki Panic that had its graphics altered to turn it into a Mario game. Not surprisingly, this resulted in a game that plays nothing at all like its predecessor. We're willing to forgive this, though, because SMB2 is just that much fun. How could we object to the ability to play as not only Mario and Luigi, but Princess Peach and Toad as well? Learning which of their unique abilities most benefits us in each level adds an extra layer of depth that wasn't in the original game. It's also very satisfying to yank vegetables out of the ground and chuck them at your foes (or just toss the foes themselves). There hasn't been another Mario game like SMB2, and we love it for that.



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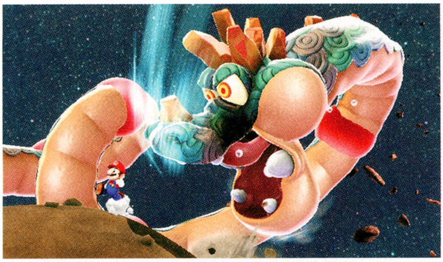


Super Mario Galaxy 2

Wii, 2010

Considering how amazingly creative the first Super Mario Galaxy is, one might assume that the developers had used all of their cool ideas and wouldn't have a lot of new concepts remaining for the sequel. Boy, would that be wrong. Somehow Nintendo managed to make a sequel that, gameplaywise, is every bit as good as its predecessor, and the action still feels fresh thanks to all-new levels and power-ups as well as some absolutely incredible boss battles. The inclusion of Yoshi and his pointer-based tongue attacks add a lot, too. On the downside, the game structure feels like a step back from the original, the story isn't nearly as neat, and Lubba (the Grimace wannabe) is one of our least-favorite Mario characters ever.

Best Enemy: Koopa

Not only is the Koopa one of the most iconic baddies in the Mario universe, but its one of the most enjoyable to deal with. After all, what's more fun than stomping on a Koopa, then chasing after the shell as it plows through rows of enemies? We also like using Yoshi to eat various colored Koopa shells in Super Mario World, each of which grants the little fella a different power.

Best Power-Up: Super Star

Though the Super Mushroom is obviously the most iconic power-up in the Super Mario series, nothing is as empowering as snagging an invincibility-granting Super Star. Using its power to plow through enemies with reckless abandon is just plain fun, and the music that accompanies the star is rockin'.

Best Spin-Off: Mario Kart

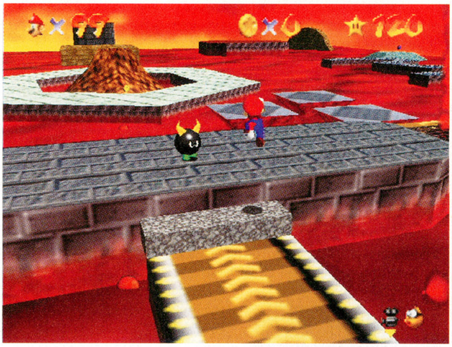
There has been a plethora of Mario spin-off series over the years, and we've had a blast with just about all of them. There's no denying the hilarity of the Mario & Luigi RPG series or the brain-bending logic puzzles of Mario's Picross. Still, when forced to pick one spin-off that we've enjoyed the most, we have to go with Mario Kart. Every time a new entry in this series is released, we spend weeks racing against each other, unlocking new characters, discovering shortcuts, and trying to avoid those darn Spiny Shells.

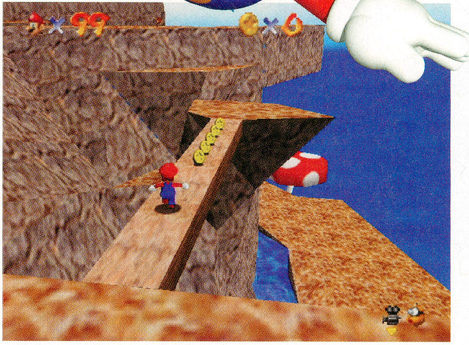
5

Super Mario 64

NINTENDO 64, 1996

It's strange to think that there was a time when no one was sure how (or even if) 2D side-scrollers could make the transition to the world of 3D polygons. It's especially odd because Super Mario 64 not only made the jump, but made it seem so effortless that it defined 3D platforming in the process. Though the graphics may look crude now, the huge worlds are still impressive, and a sense of wonder still permeates the entire game. The concept of entering a stage multiple times and completing tasks to collect stars is such a well-conceived way to inspire exploration in much deeper ways than those afforded by the linear stages of the 2D Super Mario games. Subsequent games improved on the formula, but we'll always have a soft spot for the original.





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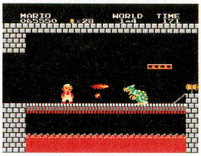
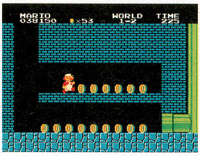
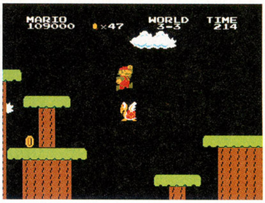




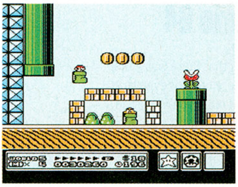


Super Mario Bros.

NES, 1985

If this list were based purely on impact or historical significance, the original Super Mario Bros. would easily be in the number-one spot. Before Super Mario Bros., most games were little more than single-screen affairs that offered limited control over your character, but that all changed as gamers raced through the 32 stages of the Mushroom Kingdom, stomping Goombas, ducking into pipes, powering up with Super Mushrooms, hopping on moving platforms, and clobbering enemies with stomped Koopa shells. The way Mario moves feels so natural that people didn't give it much thought back in the day, but Super Mario Bros. finely honed physics in video games long before it ever became a buzzword. And where would gaming would be without the timeless phrase, "Thank you Mario! But our princess is in another castle!"? But perhaps most impressive of all is the fact that, more than 25 years after its initial release, Super Mario Bros. is still a blast to play.

3



Super Mario Bros. 3

NES, 1990

It's hard to describe how heavily anticipated Super Mario Bros. 3 was. The first two Super Mario titles were such phenomena that fans went wild for any bit of new information about this sequel. They pored over every commercial and bit of magazine coverage. They tracked down PlayChoice-10 arcade machines that allowed early access to the game. Heck, the climax of the movie *The Wizard* was essentially a giant ad for SMB3, and Nintendo junkies flocked to the theater to catch a glimpse of Mario on the big screen months before his game hit stores. It turned out that all the hype was justified. SMB3 returned to the classic style of Mario gameplay, but significantly enhanced it. Better graphics, more interesting level design, and exciting new power-up items made this game feel so much bigger than its predecessors. The first time Mario donned his raccoon tail and flew into the air remains one of gaming's most memorable moments.

2

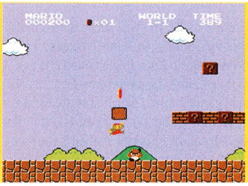
Super Mario World

SUPER NES, 1991

When it comes to 2D platforming, Super Mario World pretty much has it all. The game features the same brilliant run-and-jump gameplay as its predecessors, but the action reaches new heights thanks to additional skills (such as a spinning jump and the ability to climb fences), new power-ups (the cape, for example), an expanded lineup of enemies, and, of course, the introduction of Yoshi, Mario's voracious dinosaur steed, who brings with him a host of new play mechanics. The technology of the Super NES also allowed for creative new level designs, colorful visuals, and impressive graphical tricks. But our favorite aspect of the game might be its sense of scale and emphasis on a massive, nonlinear game world packed with hidden areas, multiple stage exits, and secret bonus levels to challenge even the most skillful players. It all adds up to a timeless masterpiece of game design.

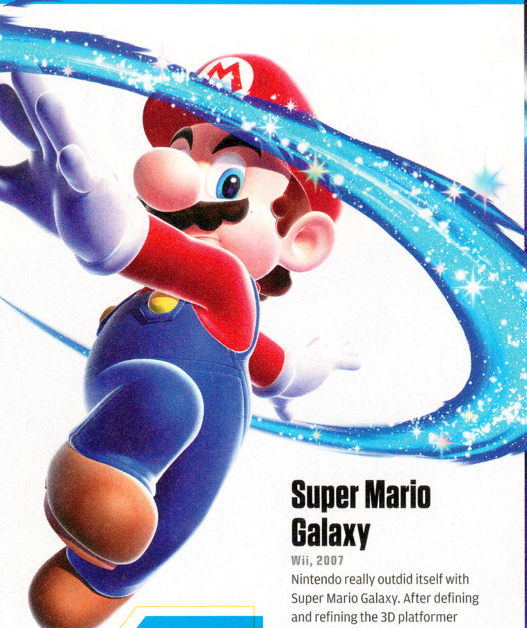
Best Mario Brother: Luigi

We're just gonna come out and say it: Luigi is the superior Mario Bro. Despite constantly being overshadowed by his more-famous sibling, Luigi never complains, and he's always ready to lend a hand when the need arises. And while Mario hogs all the glory, Luigi has obviously been polishing his skills, as evidenced by his superior jumping ability. Plus, Luigi went green even before environmentalism was cool. OK, so Mario's the guy who's saved the Mushroom Kingdom time and time again, but his poor brother deserves *some* recognition, don't you think?



Best Level Design: World 1-1 (Super Mario Bros.)

You could write an essay on how expertly designed the first level of the original Super Mario Bros. is. Every block and enemy is perfectly placed to introduce the player to the Mushroom Kingdom and its rules. From the first harmless Goomba who strolls out to teach you how to attack to the staircases that allow you to practice jumping over pits without the fear of falling, this stage is the foundation upon which the entire game—and every Mario game thereafter—is based.

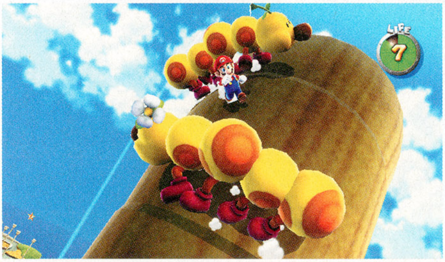


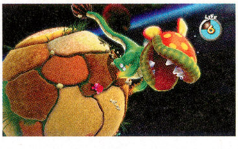
1

Super Mario Galaxy

Wii, 2007

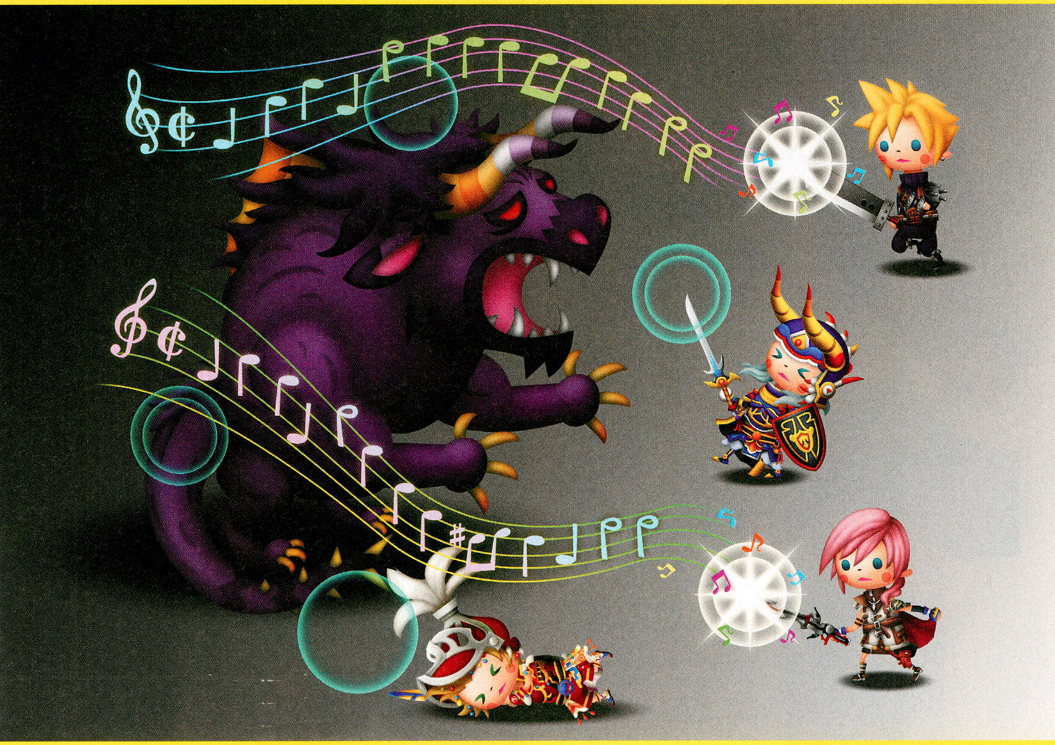
Nintendo really outdid itself with Super Mario Galaxy. After defining and refining the 3D platformer with Super Mario 64 and Super Mario Sunshine, Super Mario Galaxy perfected the formula with more-focused level design and a sense of imagination that's second to none. Ingenious spherical worlds, new power-ups, and the ability to fool around with gravity only scratch the surface of what makes the game so much fun. It seems to have no limits; whether soaring through space or exploring one of the game's dozens of themed galaxies—from underwater worlds to haunted houses to planets split between fire and ice—you're guaranteed to encounter something unique around every corner. Furthermore, the action controls like a dream (the new gesture-activated spin naturally augments the traditional Super Mario gameplay without feeling forced), the symphonic score is amazing, and the visuals are among the best Nintendo has ever produced. Super Mario Galaxy is about as close to flawless as a video game can get.





Magical History Tour

Theatrhythm Final Fantasy transforms 25 years of RPG history into gaming's first music revue.

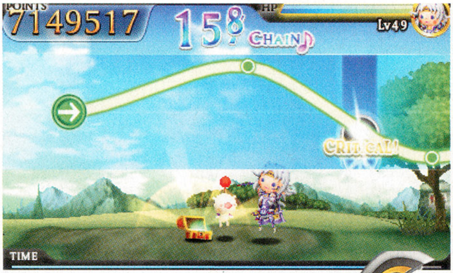


Final Fantasy has changed a lot over the years, but there's one constant that runs through the series: great music. From the original game's "Prelude" to FFXIII's "Sunleth Waterscape," there are always tracks that stay with us long after the quest is over. So what better way to commemorate Final Fantasy's 25th anniversary than by collecting all of its most memorable tunes in a single title? That's precisely the idea behind Theatrhythm Final Fantasy, a Nintendo 3DS exclusive that lets you relive the beloved role-playing saga through a surprisingly deep and uniquely captivating rhythm game.

BY **STEVE THOMASON**

PUBLISHER: **SQUARE ENIX** DEVELOPER: **INDIESZERO** RELEASE: **SUMMER 2012**

N3DS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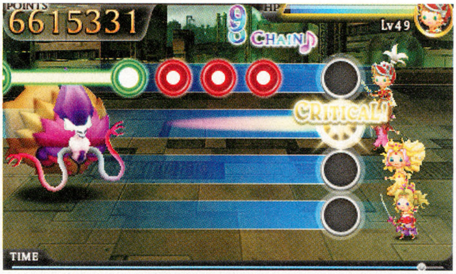
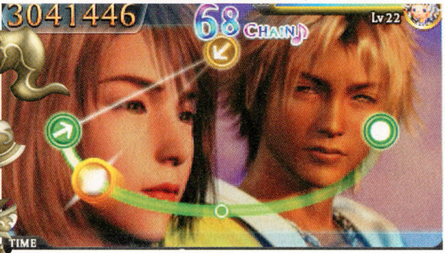
7149517
158
CHAIN
HP
Lv49
CRITICAL
TIME


POINTS
6615331
9
CHAIN
HP
Lv49
CRITICAL
TIME

[Below] Thankfully, none of Final Fantasy X's event stages make you keep the beat to awkward laughter.


3041446
68
CHAIN
Lv22
TIME

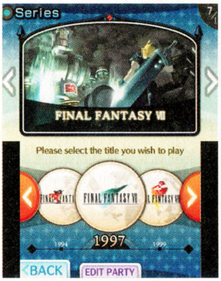
HEROIC HARMONIES

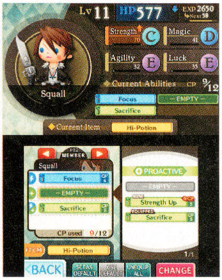
The core play mechanics in Theatrhythm are standard genre fare—you tap, flick, and drag the stylus to the beat of the music as prompted by colorful visual triggers. In keeping with the Final Fantasy theme, however, the game mixes in some strong RPG flavor. For starters, you'll assemble a party of four characters, selecting from a roster that initially includes one protagonist from each of the mainline Final Fantasy titles. (See the "Fantasy Team" sidebar below.) Your choices aren't merely sentimental, either; every character has different stats and abilities that influence how well they perform in the various types of stages, so teaming Warrior of Light, Cecil, Cloud, and Lightning just because they're your favorites doesn't necessarily make sense strategically. Of course, how you balance those considerations is up to you; some fans probably won't pick Squall regardless of the gameplay consequences. Whatever.

Once your party is set, you can take it on a musical tour through any of Final Fantasy's 13 main installments via Theatrhythm's Series mode. Within that mode, every FF title is divided into three distinct stages—field, battle, and event—with tracks selected from the corresponding portions of each game. For example, Final Fantasy X features "Mi'ihen Highroad" on the field stage, "Fight with Seymour" on the battle stage, and "Isn't It Wonderful?" on the event stage. All of the music is from the original soundtracks, which means classic chip tunes for the NES- and Super NES-era stuff.

Each stage type unfolds a bit differently. Field stages are meant to be sort of relaxing—as you hit your notes, the party leader strolls from left to right, occasionally passing familiar landmarks from the given title (FFVII's Midgar, FFXII's Giza Plains, etc.). The better you play, the faster he travels, and the goal is to cover as much ground as possible before the song finishes. If you miss a beat, however, your leader might trip and have to be replaced by the next person in your group. Should all four heroes end up falling on their faces, it's game over. The characters best suited to field stages are those with high agility since they move at a brisker pace and are less likely to stumble.

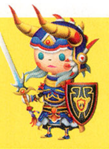
Battle stages are evocative of traditional Final Fantasy encounters. Your party members line up on one side of the screen, unleashing attacks and magic spells on the foe


Series
7/
FINAL FANTASY VII
Please select the title you wish to play
FINAL FANTASY VII
1997
BACK
EDIT PARTY

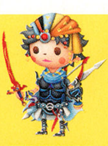

Lv 11
HP 577
EXP 2650
Strength C
Magic D
Agility E
Luck E
Squall
Current Abilities
CP 9/12
Focus
EMPTY
Sacrifice
Current Item
Hi-Potion
MEMBER
Squall
PROACTIVE
Strength Up
CP used 9/12
Hi-Potion
BACK
CHANGE

FANTASY TEAM

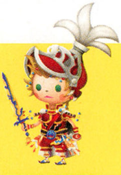
Here are the characters you can add to your party at the beginning of the game.



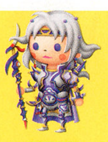
Warrior of Light



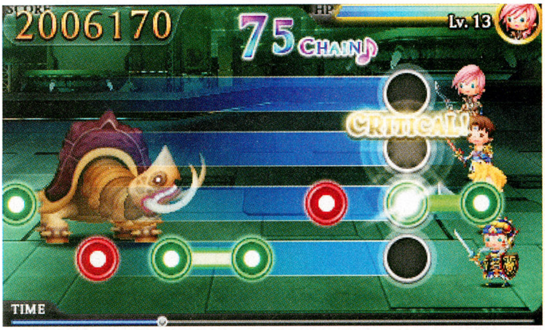
Firion

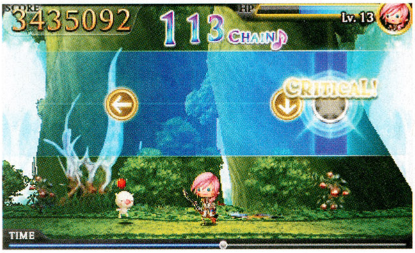


Onion Knight

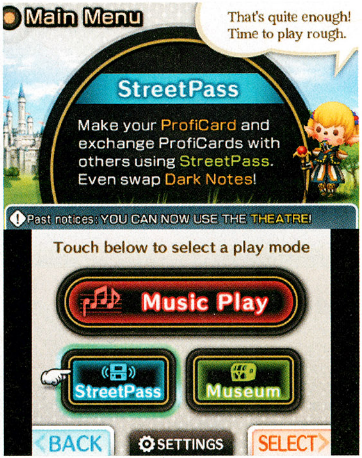


Cecil





[Right] You can play Dark Notes cooperatively using wireless multiplayer and swap them via StreetPass.



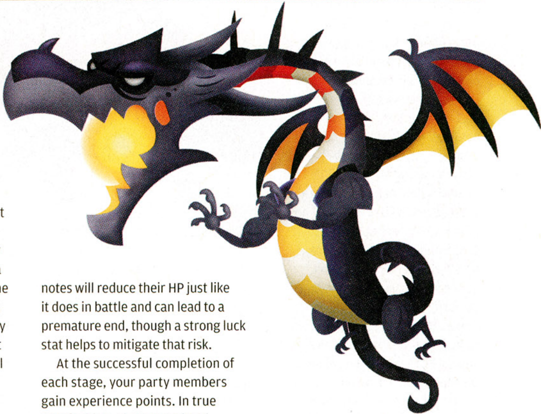
That's quite enough! Time to play rough.

StreetPass

Make your ProfiCard and exchange ProfiCards with others using StreetPass. Even swap Dark Notes!

Past notices: YOU CAN NOW USE THE THEATRE!

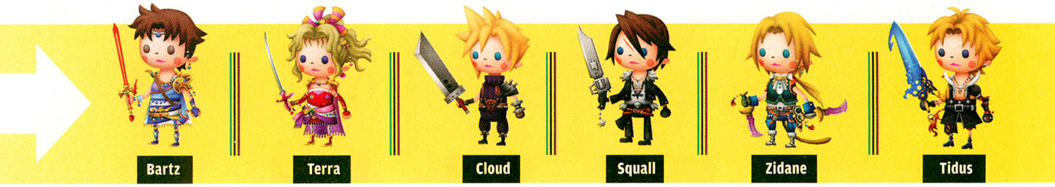
Touch below to select a play mode

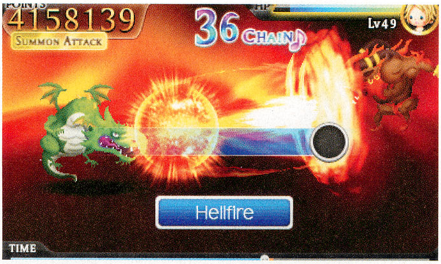


across from them. Of course, in this case how the skirmish unfolds is dictated by how well your stylus keeps up with the music. Battle tracks tend to be up-tempo, and you have to keep your eye on four separate "lanes" of scrolling prompts. If you mess up, the enemy will assault one of your heroes and deplete some of the party's HP. As long as you avoid doing that too often, though, you'll eventually defeat your adversary and another will take its place. That pattern continues until you reach the boss or the song concludes. Which happens first depends in large part on the strength and magic stats of your characters.

Finally, event stages take some of the franchise's most emotional tracks—like "Celes's Theme" from FFVI and "Waltz for the Moon" from FFVIII—and set them against a montage of cut-scenes pulled straight from the corresponding title. Naturally, the "cut-scenes" for the 8- and 16-bit games are just little sprites walking around, but all of the modern chapters employ the stunning CG that has become a hallmark of the series. For longtime fans of Final Fantasy, these stages can be a stirring trip down memory lane. There's just something about interacting with the music while all of these defining moments unfold that's pretty compelling. And yes, FFVII's event stage includes the legendary demise of a certain flower merchant, so those for whom the emotional wounds still haven't healed should keep a tissue handy (and maybe consider seeing a therapist). Despite not having a visual presence during these stages, your party does still play a role. Missing notes will reduce their HP just like it does in battle and can lead to a premature end, though a strong luck stat helps to mitigate that risk.

At the successful completion of each stage, your party members gain experience points. In true RPG fashion, characters level up when they reach specific thresholds, boosting their stats and occasionally learning new abilities. The latter are based on traditional Final Fantasy skills and spells. Some bestow their possessor with a persistent benefit while others are activated only when the necessary conditions are met. If your group's HP drops below 25%, for example, Tidus will use his Cheer ability to boost the strength of all party members for the remainder of the stage. There are limits to how many abilities each character can equip, however, lending an extra layer




POINTS
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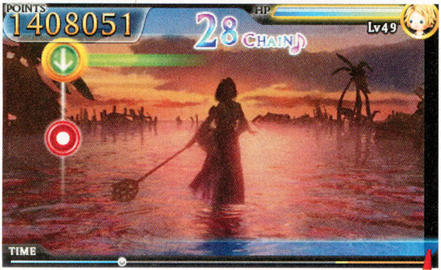
SUMMON ATTACK
36 CHAIN
HP
Lv49
Hellfire
TIME


POINTS
1408051
28 CHAIN
HP
Lv49
TIME

of strategy to your preparations. During our time with the game, we found that the most useful abilities are usually those that help compensate for the *player's* weaknesses.

You can also bolster your chances with items, which you acquire by accomplishing such tasks as vanquishing a particular foe in battle or encountering a moogle on the field. Items are activated automatically in the same way as abilities, but you can equip only one at a time for the entire group, and they're depleted after use.

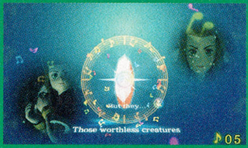
Should you ever feel the need to shake things up drastically—or you just get tired of looking at certain characters—you always have the option to swap in new faces. You're stuck with that lineup for all three stages of a given quest, though, and only active party members earn EXP, so it's important to choose your substitutions wisely.

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

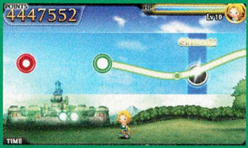
A dedicated player could probably get through Theatrhythm's main Series mode in a couple of hours, but the game is packed with unlockables that significantly extend its appeal. That includes movie scenes from every title, collectible cards of various heroes and monsters (with Holofoil and Platinum variants), more than 70 songs for the in-game music player, enhanced difficulty levels, and a host of secret characters

ROLE-PLAYING MUSICAL

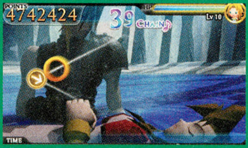
Theatrhythm divides each Final Fantasy title into three stages, plus optional opening and ending minigames (in which you simply tap a crystal as notes spiral toward the center of it). As an example, here's how Final Fantasy VII breaks down.


But they...
Those worthless creatures
05

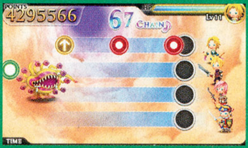
OPENING
"The Prelude"


POINTS
4447552
HP
Lv10
TIME

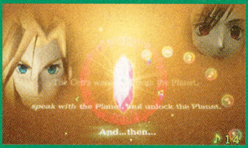
FIELD STAGE
"Main Theme of Final Fantasy VII"


POINTS
4742424
39 CHAIN
HP
Lv10
TIME

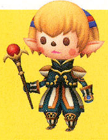
EVENT STAGE
"Aerith's Theme"


POINTS
4295566
67 CHAIN
HP
Lv11
TIME

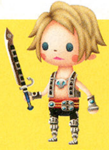
BATTLE STAGE
"One-Winged Angel"


speak with the Planet, and unlock the Planet.
And...then...
14

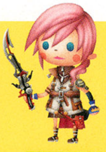
ENDING
"Ending Credits"



Shantotto



Vaan

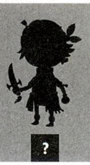


Lightning

SECRET WARRIORS

You can unlock more than a dozen extra characters. Can you guess who these are?

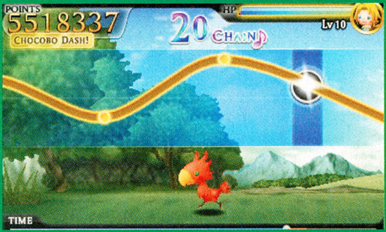
?



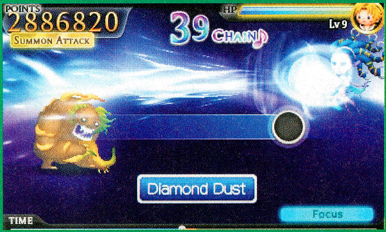
?

FEATURE ATTRACTION

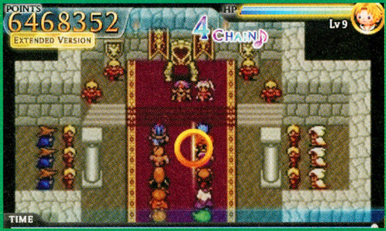
At a certain point during each stage, all of the notes will turn silver for a short time. If you can get through that sequence without error, you'll initiate a special event called the Feature Drive. What form it takes depends on the stage type.



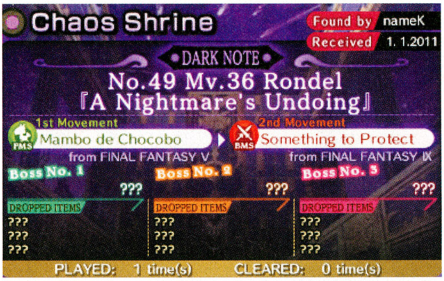
FIELD STAGE **Your character is temporarily replaced by a chocobo, which travels through the stage much faster.**



BATTLE STAGE **A legendary summon like Shiva or Ifrit appears and unleashes a devastating attack on your foes.**



EVENT STAGE **You get an extended version of the stage, though it ends immediately the next time you miss a note.**



Chaos Shrine

Found by nameK
Received 1. 1.2011

• DARK NOTE •
No.49 Mv.36 Rondel
『A Nightmare's Undoing』

1st Movement
FMS Mambo de Chocobo
from FINAL FANTASY V

2nd Movement
BMS Something to Protect
from FINAL FANTASY IX

Boss No. 1 ???
DROPPED ITEMS
???
???
???

Boss No. 2 ???
DROPPED ITEMS
???
???
???

Boss No. 3 ???
DROPPED ITEMS
???
???
???

PLAYED: 1 time(s) CLEARED: 0 time(s)

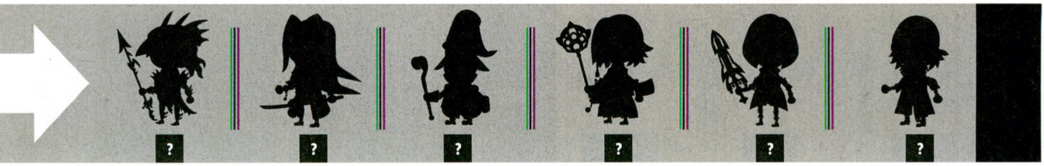
that can join your party.

Then there's the incredibly expansive Chaos Shrine. This unique gameplay mode is unlocked pretty early on and offers tons of new content. It's composed of selections called Dark Notes, which consist of a field stage and a battle stage. Much of the music featured in these stages can't be found in Series mode, and your typical Dark Note couples tracks from two different games. So you could have "Vana'diel March" from Final Fantasy XI in the field stage and "Battle to the Death" from Final Fantasy VI in the battle stage.

Adding a further wrinkle, every Dark Note has three different bosses, and each boss holds a trio of distinct—and often rare—items. Which boss you'll face in battle depends on how far you travel during the field stage. That means there may be occasions when you actually want to slow your party down so you can take on boss number one or two. The Chaos Shrine really takes the strategic side of Theatrhythm to new heights, and it puts your gameplay skills to the test, as well. The difficulty rating of each Dark Note you unlock is based on your active party's current level. Even at relatively modest levels, we found the challenge to be pretty stiff; the notes come much faster and the sequences are more complex compared to Series mode. Unless you're some sort of rhythm savant, Chaos Shrine should take quite a while to master.

Even then, Square Enix hopes to keep you playing with approximately 50 additional songs that will be released as paid downloadable content—a first for the Nintendo 3DS. How much those tracks will cost and when they'll be available has yet to be determined for North America, but in Japan Square Enix has debuted eight tunes every couple of weeks for about $2 apiece.

Whatever the case, we're eager to play as much Theatrhythm as we can get our hands on. The potency of its allure obviously hinges on how much you love Final Fantasy, but put the nostalgia factor aside, and you've still got one of the most creative and well-produced rhythm games to come along in some time. Make no mistake, though; this is a celebration of Final Fantasy above all else—and a pretty gratifying one at that.



Backstage Visit

Eager to learn more about Theatrhythm's development, we went to producer Ichiro Hazama for the inside scoop. Topics discussed include the power of memories, why he's a ladies' man, and a potential future for the Theatrhythm concept.

NINTENDO POWER **Can you talk a little bit about the genesis of this project? Where did the idea come from?**

ICHIRO HAZAMA It all began around 2006, when I created a proposal for a Final Fantasy music game. However, at the time, the technology was not available to accommodate what I wanted to do. Later, when the Nintendo 3DS was released, I saw the opportunity and consulted Tetsuya Nomura—the creative producer on Theatrhythm. We then brought [the idea] to indieszero, and everything proceeded smoothly after that.

How did the partnership with indieszero come about?

I used to be in the merchandise-goods department at Square Enix, so I already had a good relationship with indieszero. At that time, I worked with them to produce Final Fantasy trading cards, and they were very thoughtful and thorough with their work. On top of that, indieszero has a great track record of developing Nintendo handheld games—all of which led me to reach out to them for this project. *[Ed's note: indieszero previously worked on Electroplankton and Retro Game Challenge for the Nintendo DS.]*

How did you go about deciding which tracks to include from each game?

When Dissidia 012 Final Fantasy was being developed, we conducted a survey on the official Square Enix members-only community site asking about their favorite Final Fantasy tracks. By combining the results of that survey with our development team's input, we finalized the overall music selection so that we would have a balanced track list. I must say that this was a very difficult process.

Why was it important to use the original tracks for each song rather than rearrangements?

I believe music plays a very important role in any conversation about Final Fantasy. After putting a lot of thought into this, I felt that using the original tracks would best allow players to recall their fondest memories.

How did you choose which scenes to use for the event stages?

We gathered input from the developers on which scenes they felt were the most memorable, and prepared some rough edits. We then had Visual Works (our internal CGI studio) apply the final touches.

Why did you choose this particular art style for the character and monster designs?

Characters throughout the Final Fantasy series have been created from many different art styles, so it's incredibly difficult to have them successfully mesh together in one game as they are. We decided on this superdeformed art style as it provides a consistent look that isn't too outlandish for this title, but could also appeal to those who are not necessarily fans of the Final Fantasy series.

Will there be any major differences between the Japanese and US versions of the game?

There are no differences aside from the language being localized.

Which characters are your favorites to play as in the game?

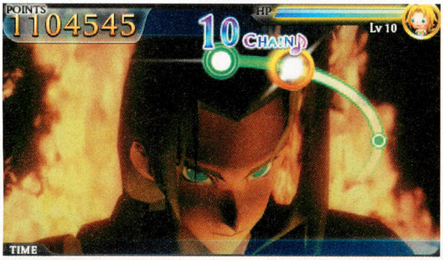
I try to keep it simple; I often go with an all-female party.

Obviously, Final Fantasy's music has been a major aspect of its appeal over the years. Why do you think it strikes a chord with so many players?

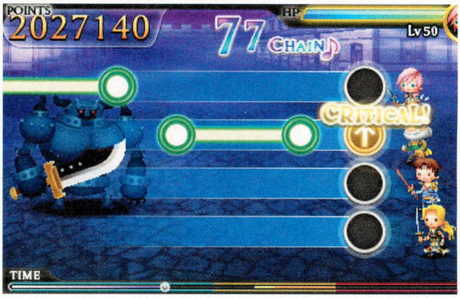
Twenty-five years is a very long period of time, and there are fans of each title within that history. I'm sure there are people who have just stepped into the series with the latest title, Final Fantasy XIII-2. People can remember specific moments from their past through music, but the fact that music from the Final Fantasy series has the ability to make one reflect back on their life, their history—I think that's what makes music from Final Fantasy so special to fans.

Are there any other franchises for which you'd like to make a Theatrhythm?

I'm hoping we can explore possibilities of swapping out the Final Fantasy in Theatrhythm with other titles. I'm looking forward to everyone's suggestions.



[Above] He may have an impressive coif, but this guy is a total jerkstore.



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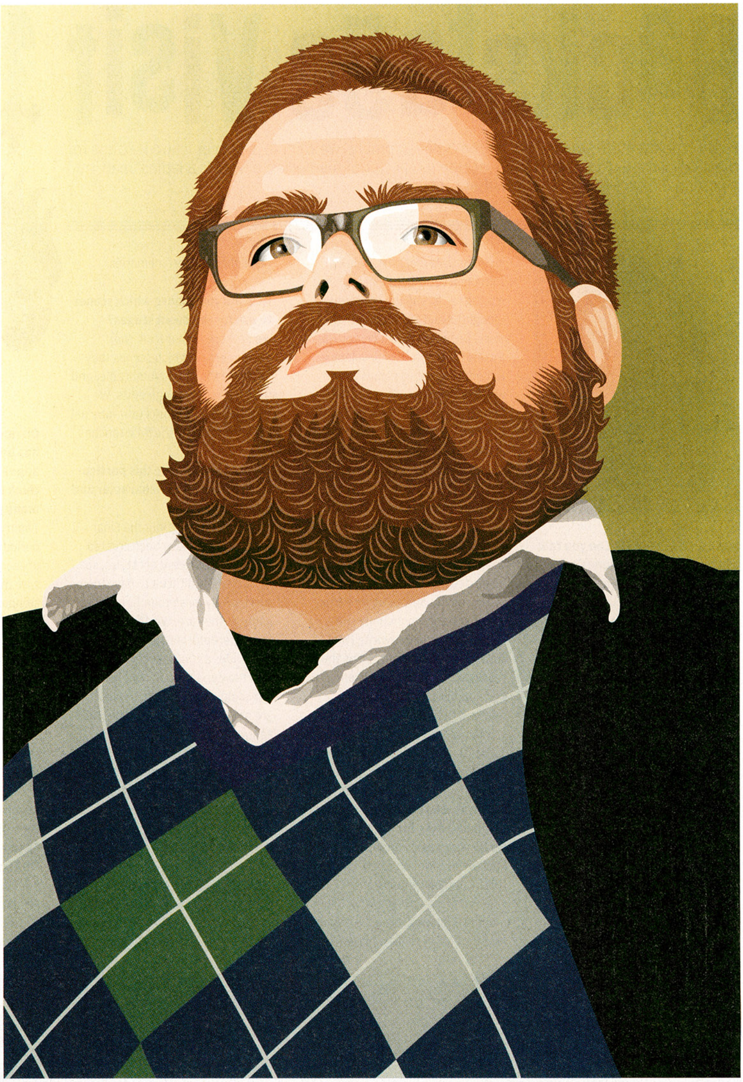
Power Profiles



DATE OF BIRTH
January 20, 1985

BIRTHPLACE
Florence, Oregon

POSITION
Localization Editor, Aksys Games

BEST KNOWN FOR
Localizing Nine Hours, Nine Persons, Nine Doors; his beard

FAVORITE FOOD
Meat

CURRENT PROJECTS
Virtue's Last Reward

Ben Bateman

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTINA EMPEDOCLES

It could be argued that localization editors don't make games, but there's no question that they make games better. Years ago localization—the process of translating and rewriting a game to make it suitable for an audience outside of the title's country of origin—was an afterthought that often resulted in unintentional hilarity, but these days it's an essential part of the gaming business, especially when you're talking about Japanese-developed games that are released in North America. Ben Bateman of Aksys Games is a localization specialist who has worked on the sleeper sensation Nine Hours, Nine Persons, Nine Doors as well as numerous other titles. Here's what Bateman had to say about his area of expertise.

NINTENDO POWER
How did you get into the video game business?
BEN BATEMAN I've always liked video games, although I didn't really get a chance to play many of them until I was in high school and could buy my own consoles, since my parents weren't too interested in doing that. One of my fellow nerds at college had found himself a job at Aksys, and when the video-editing gig I was in the middle of suddenly disappeared, he helped me get a job here as a tester. Once testing was finished, it was pretty clear that my time was limited, so I made a point of showing everyone all the other wonderful skills I had. Eventually I had enough hands in enough pots that letting me go would have been more irritating than giving me a full-time job, and I moved on up...to gainful employment.

When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?
That would depend on which kid version of me you talk to. For a significant time I'm pretty sure I wanted to be a train engineer, because *my gosh* trains are *the business*. Then I wanted to be a novelist, and even went so far as to start a couple stories, most of which were about my friends and I being 10-year-old superpowered geniuses with spaceships, and all of which would probably make you vomit blood.

What is your primary goal as a localization editor?
To do my best to make sure the game I'm working on is immersive, understandable, consistent, and most of all, *fun*. A good localization polishes and illuminates a game; it doesn't repaint it wholesale.

What's the process you go through before beginning a localization project?
I try and get lots of sleep, to try and build up a sort of...reservoir, you might say. When I have the time, I have been known to do a little prep work. On Virtue's Last Reward, for instance, I spent a decent amount of time thinking about the characters and their personalities, and collected a bunch of notes on who they were, what motivated them, how they thought and spoke, etc. I tried to come up with characters or actors that they reminded me of. I also spent some time listening to their voice clips from the game, to get an idea of how they sounded in the Japanese version. Zero III has a unique speech pattern that involves rabbit-related puns, so I built a list of rabbit puns I could use.

What are some common misconceptions about localization?
A lot of the biggest misconceptions, in my opinion, revolve around how games are chosen for localization, and the factors that play into that. Money is one factor, yes, but there are hundreds of others: Does the company own all of the game? (Oftentimes things like voices are actually owned by the recording studio, the voice actors, or their production companies.) Do we have a way to get in contact with that studio? Are they even interested in getting their game localized? (This isn't always the foregone conclusion people seem to think it is.) Is the game likely to be approved by the platform owner? The list goes on.

What are some examples of significant changes that you've had to make to a game so it's suitable for a North American audience?
Well, in 999, two of the puzzles had to be significantly altered. The first puzzle used the Japanese words for "red" and "blue," and the puzzle involved their place on the grid that's used in Japanese to write out all the syllables. There's no equivalent to this in the US, so Chunsoft was kind enough to redo the puzzle to use symbols instead of Japanese characters.

In general, what's the most challenging aspect of localization?
One of the more difficult things is working on projects that you may not actually like that much. All of my games are my babies, of course, and they are all equal in my love, but let's face it: some are a little more equal than others. Understanding characters you hate so that you can write them properly, or struggling to communicate ideas you find nonsensical in such a way that they come across correctly can be a real challenge.

Nine Hours, Nine Persons, Nine Doors seemed to strike a chord with a good number of players. What do you think attracted players to that title?
I think the things that attracted people to 999 were the story and the characters. It fits into the same vein as the Ace Attorney games or [cough] Jake Hunter [cough] and gives people a thick, juicy narrative to sink their teeth into, combined with juuuuust enough gameplay that they don't start thinking, "Wait, why don't I just read a book?" Add to that the bait-and-switch where characters that appeared to conform to classic stereotypes were actually quite complex, and you have a winning cast.

Which character in 999 was the most difficult to find a "voice" for?
Probably Junpei. As the main character, he was also the most "flat," presumably to make it easier

GAMEOGRAPHY

Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles is unique due to the fact that Bateman worked on the game twice. He was a game tester when it was initially released, and when an expanded version came out the following year, he rewrote the original's stilted translation.

JAKE HUNTER: DETECTIVE CHRONICLES
2008, NINTENDO DS
TESTER

HP 1126/1531
SP 1332/1410

FROM THE ABYSS
2008, NINTENDO DS
EDITOR/PROOFREADER

Old ax

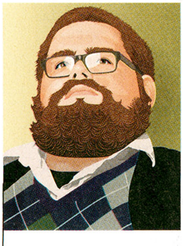
I can break small obstacles with this.
It's really old..
It might break if
I'm not careful.

THERESIA
2008, NINTENDO DS
EDITOR

Alright, well, where does your mommy work?

JAKE HUNTER DETECTIVE STORY: MEMORIES OF THE PAST
2009, NINTENDO DS
EDITOR

Power Profiles



for the player to relate to/project themselves onto him. Unfortunately, leaving him flat makes his—spoiler!—romance with Akane feel a little dull, and also just makes him kind of boring. The script has him being sort of a smartass and a little bit of a dork from time to time, so I played that up. A lot of his sarcasm and drier humor probably just comes straight from me.

I know the project has just started, but how is work proceeding on Virtue's Last Reward? What stands out about it so far?
It's hard to really say anything about VLR without giving something significant away. This is the kind of game where there aren't really any extraneous details—everything is eventually important. I can say that so far it's been a lot of fun to work on. Chunsoft is a great, helpful partner, and I'm really happy to get the chance to work with them again.

What makes a localization project fun for you?
Interesting, well-developed characters. A huge portion of nearly every localization project is writing dialog. If the characters are interesting, well-developed, and diverse, not only is it easier to write them—it's more fun.

What game or game series that's never been officially localized for the US would you like to have a chance to work on and why?
Duel Love would be great, but the DS ship has almost certainly sailed on that one. A game that's *slightly* more likely that I would love to work on is Earth Seeker. The art and character designs are wonderful, and the world seems pretty cool too.

As an obvious enthusiast of Japanese games, why do you think they've stumbled a bit in recent years (especially outside Nintendo platforms)? Is there something developers could do to appeal more to Western audiences?
I think there are two reasons Japanese games have kind of lost the spotlight in the last, I dunno, decade or so. The first has nothing to do with Japan. I think that when video games first started being "a thing," Japan was at the top of the, uh, game. I don't know enough history and culture to really guess at why, but a whole lot of innovative, powerful, well-remembered games came out of Japan for quite a while there. Recently, though, I think the West has realized the financial potential of video games, and turned its tremendous and powerful entertainment industry toward making them. Money doesn't always equal quality, but it does equal a level of polish and a degree of advertising and consumer awareness that smaller companies can't match.

> *"A lot of [Junpei's] sarcasm and drier humor probably just comes straight from me."*

The second reason, which I think is related to Japan, is that more and more Japanese entertainment is being targeted to what, for lack of a better term, I would call the *otaku* market. It makes some sense from an immediate-profit standpoint, because this is a portion of the market that is willing to pay exorbitant prices for things that cater directly to their interests. The problem is that this market isn't growing, and as it's catered to it only becomes more insular, which requires even more specific products.

What aspect of your job do you enjoy the most?
That's hard to say. I really enjoy being creative, and I really enjoy writing, so I like doing those things a lot. Maybe the best thing about my job, though, is seeing people happy with a game I worked on. I feel good and they feel good. It's a win-win.

When you're stumped by a particularly difficult problem while localizing a game, what's your process for working through it?
Twitter. And Tumblr. And Facebook. Really, though, my solution is usually, "I'm going to stare at this for five minutes. If that doesn't work, I'm going to take a break. If that doesn't work, I'm going to make a note and come back to it." Most of the time that works pretty well.

Other than titles that you've worked on, what video game localizations have especially impressed you?
The Legend of Heroes: Trails in the Sky from Xseed Games is probably the best localization I can think of in recent memory.

Whose works in other forms of media, such as film or literature, do you most admire or enjoy?
As far as film goes, I really like Miyazaki's movies. Even if the plot or characters aren't always that great, the animation is consistently incredible. *Princess Mononoke* is probably my favorite of his. Quentin Tarantino is another filmmaker who generally makes things I enjoy. *Star Wars* is a huge part of my childhood.

TV shows would take too long to describe in detail, so here's a list of some of my favorites right now: *Sherlock, Doctor Who, Better Off Ted, Burn Notice, Avatar: The Last Airbender, Sym-Bionic Titan, Tiger & Bunny, Star Driver, Leverage*, and *White Collar*. I'm also (finally) getting into *Supernatural* and *Community*.

One Piece and *Toriko* are everything that is right about shonen manga.

What is your favorite hobby or pastime?
I'd like to say something classy, like charity work or falconry, but the honest answer would be eating. I'm a picky eater, but man, do I love to eat.

If you could have one superpower, what would it be?
Unconditional love.

GAMEOGRAPHY

HERO'S SAGA LAEVATEIN TACTICS
2009, NINTENDO DS
EDITOR

BLAZBLUE: CONTINUUM SHIFT
2010, XBOX 360
COEDITOR

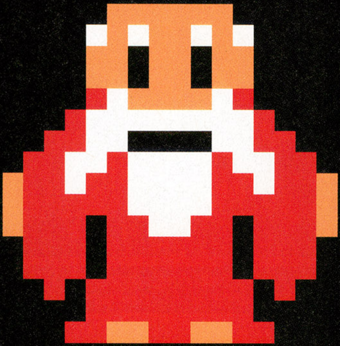
Lion
What do you mean to do to us?!

NINE HOURS, NINE PERSONS, NINE DOORS
2010, NINTENDO DS
EDITOR

HAKUOKI: DEMON OF THE FLEETING BLOSSOM
2012, PSP
EDITOR

"IT'S DANGEROUS TO GO ALONE! TAKE THIS."

—OLD MAN, THE LEGEND OF ZELDA, 1987



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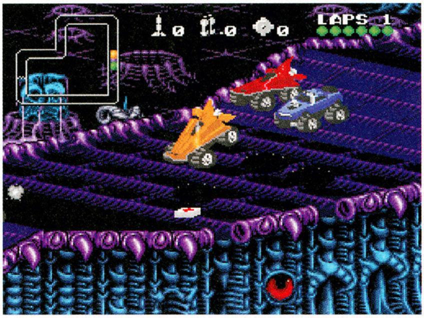
Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

We're Cold Slither! You'll be joining us soon!

Rock n' Roll Racing

PLATFORM: **SUPER NES**
PUBLISHER: **INTERPLAY**
DEVELOPER: **SILICON & SYNAPSE**
RELEASE DATE: **SEPTEMBER 1993**
COVERED IN ISSUES: **52, 56, 58, 62**
CAMEOS FROM OTHER GAMES: **1**

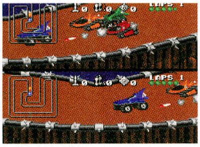
The stage is set! The green flag drops!



Being in first place is good...unless your opponents decide to blow you to bits with a well-placed missile. Thank goodness for health pickups!

In the 16-bit era, racing fans had a number of quality games to choose from. For sleekness and speed, you could play F-Zero. For cartoony fun, you could opt for Super Mario Kart. But if you wanted something edgy, explosive, and out of control, there was one clear way to go: Rock n' Roll Racing from developer Silicon & Synapse (the company that's known today as Blizzard Entertainment).

Eschewing a pseudo-3D view for an isometric perspective (not unlike that of NES classic R.C. Pro-Am), Rock n' Roll Racing was a gritty yet humorous futuristic racing title in which pretty much anything was fair game as you and three opponents battled to reach the finish line across a variety of alien worlds. Knowledge of the hazard-filled tracks and mastery of the best racing lines were certainly helpful for coming in first, but more often than not you'd need to rely on your vehicle's weapons to ensure victory. Plasma shots, missiles, landmines, and oil slicks were just a few of the tricks in your arsenal. (Appropriately, the main buttons on the Super NES controller were dedicated to gas and weapons; breaking was a secondary consideration at best.) Seven playable characters and a variety of vehicles and upgrades, which could be purchased using your in-game winnings, added to the strategies you could employ.

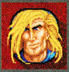


But as you might be able to guess from its title, chaotic high-speed action was only half of Rock n' Roll Racing's appeal. The game also boasted some of the best audio on the Super NES. Synthesized versions of five classic rock/metal tunes from the preceding decades—Steppenwolf's "Born to be Wild," Black Sabbath's "Paranoid," Deep Purple's "Highway Star," George Thorogood's "Bad to the Bone," and Henry Mancini's "The Peter Gunn Theme"—really got players' adrenaline pumping, while commentator Larry "Supermouth" Huffman provided an air of electricity via impressive digitized voice clips. Unlike a lot of speech from the early '90s, the commentary in Rock n' Roll Racing still sounds fantastic today.

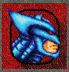
Other highlights included tight controls, solid visuals, and a split-screen two-player mode—all of which contributed to make Rock n' Roll Racing one of the most enjoyable driving games of its day. **—CHRIS H.**

THOSE READY TO ROCK

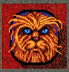
Rock n' Roll Racing features seven playable characters, each with different backgrounds and stat enhancements. Here's a brief look.



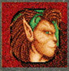
Snake Sanders is unmatched when it comes to pure speed. His name may be inspired by the band Whitesnake.



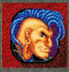
Cyberhawk looks pretty cool, but his stats aren't the most impressive.



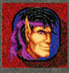
Ivanzypher appears to be a Wookiee. Does he rip his opponents' arms off if he loses?



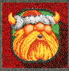
Feline racer **Katarina Lyons** is the only female playable character in the game.



With good cornering and acceleration, tough guy **Jake Badlands** is a well-balanced racer.



The elflike **Tarquinn** might not seem too intimidating, but he's a very effective competitor on the track.



Olaf is a secret character who first appeared in Interplay's game The Lost Vikings. He has the best stats.

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REVIEWS

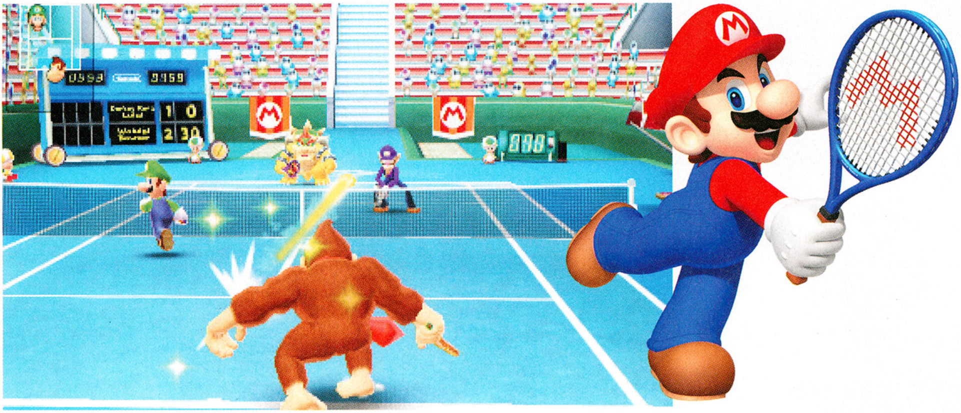
IN THIS SECTION

NINTENDO 3DS

MARIO TENNIS OPEN pg.84

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3D pg.86

Tennis, anyone? Mario and company hit the court once again in Mario Tennis Open for Nintendo 3DS.



Soft Serve

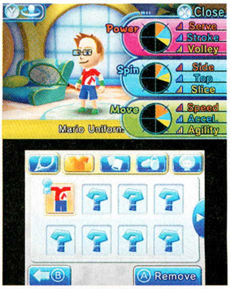
MARIO TENNIS OPEN

7.0

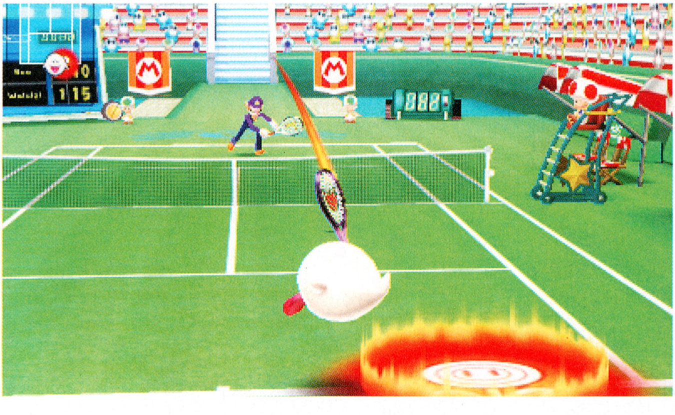
Although I don't consider myself to be a sports-game fanatic, I do have an affinity for certain games in the genre—particularly the ones starring Mario and his pals because those titles tend to be fun, both in tone and in gameplay. Of those, I'm particularly fond of the golf and tennis games made by Camelot, as the developer has mastered the art of making these sports accessible to non-sports-game-fans like me.

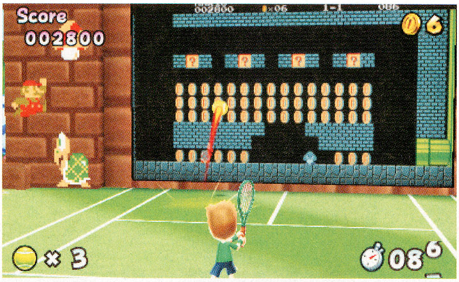
And Mario Tennis Open is perhaps Camelot's most pick-up-and-play title to date. In addition to using the face buttons and Circle Pad, you can use the Nintendo 3DS system's touch screen and gyro controls. All of your shot types appear on the touch screen; you simply tap one of the onscreen icons to perform the shot you want. Making things even easier is the new Simple Shot, which automatically employs the best type for the given situation. This is especially useful when Chance Shot opportunities appear on the court—you don't have to think about what button to press. (Chance Shots are more powerful versions of standard ones; they aren't nearly as awesomely over-the-top as the Power Shots in previous iterations of Mario Tennis, though.) Say a Chance Area pops up in the form of a blue ring, for example, signifying that you should use a slice to unleash a Chance Shot. You can just tap the Simple Shot button to let the Chance Shot fly (though it won't be quite as powerful as it would if you actually pressed the slice button).

As for directing where hits go, you have two options. You can hold the N3DS horizontally to use the more-traditional control scheme in which the stereoscopic 3D is enabled, the camera is pulled back, and you move your player and aim your shots using the Circle Pad. Or you can hold the handheld vertically to utilize gyro controls, wherein the 3D effect is disabled, the camera is positioned behind the player, your character runs to the ball automatically (although you can still use the Circle Pad as well), and you physically move the N3DS system to aim. These gyro controls combined with the Simple Shot lowers the barrier to entry significantly and makes playing Mario Tennis Open a snap. I think it streamlines things a bit *too* much, in fact; I was able to plow through the majority of the

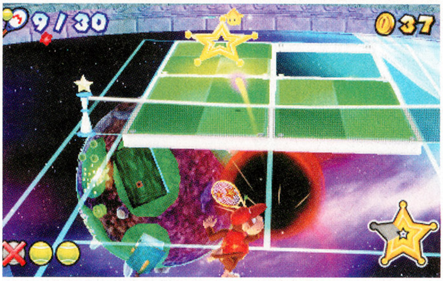


15 - 30
Replay





[Above] Take the original Super Mario Bros. and combine it with tennis, and you get our favorite of this title's four minigames, Super Mario Tennis.



game's eight tournaments without much of a hassle, making the first few feel tedious. I encountered a handful of challenging opponents in the final tournaments, preventing me from relying solely on the Simple Shot, but I rarely ever switched from the gyro option because it's so effective.

Fortunately, there's more to Mario Tennis Open than just Tournament and Exhibition matches; the four included Special Games are not only amusing, but also help improve your skills. In Ring Shot, you rally with an AI-controlled player, hitting balls through rings and earning points as you do so. Galaxy Rally challenges you to avoid hitting balls into the gaps that appear on the court. Ink Showdown has you trying to hit balls past your opponent while you deal with the ink globs spat from three Inky Piranha Plants. Last but certainly not least is my favorite minigame, Super Mario Tennis. Here you play an autoscrolling version of the original Super Mario Bros., using your tennis ball to collect coins, pick up power-ups (such as the Super Mushroom, which makes the ball bigger), and smack enemies along the way. All of these minigames reward you with coins, which are used to purchase items you've unlocked.

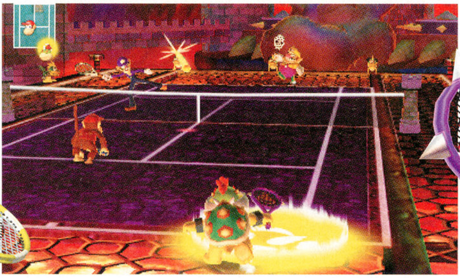
As fun as these Special Games are, though, I didn't feel the urge to keep playing them over and over again (other than to farm coins). In fact, I wasn't incentivized to replay *any* of the single-player modes after I had been through them a couple of times. It made me sorely miss the compelling RPG mode that was present in the previous portable Mario Tennis iterations; playing Exhibition and Tournament matches—despite unlocking stat-altering rackets, outfits, wristbands, and shoes for your Mii character as you do so—just doesn't have the same appeal.

But as in the RPGless console editions of Mario Tennis, the multiplayer is the big draw. You and your pals can play singles and doubles Exhibition matches, as well as multiplayer versions of Ring Shot and Super Mario Tennis. Even better, you can enjoy these via Download Play if not everyone has a copy of the game. Additionally, you can hop online and play Exhibition matches against your buddies, or you can face off against a random online opponent in your region in singles competition. Speaking of random folks, Mario Tennis Open's StreetPass functionality allows you to play with a computer-controlled version of a passerby's Mii character, either competing in a first-to-seven-points tiebreak-style StreetPass match or cooperating to accrue as many points—and thus coins—as possible in a quick game of Ring Shot.

For better and for worse, Mario Tennis Open is clearly meant to be a very accessible console-style experience on a handheld. Despite my qualms, I recommend checking out Mario Tennis Open, if only because it's fun to play with friends.

—JUSTIN C.

N3DS PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **CAMELOT**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**



WRITERS' BLOCK

THEATRHYTHM FINAL FANTASY IS CHOCK-FULL OF CATCHY TUNES. WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE FINAL FANTASY SONG?

JUSTIN CHENG

I don't know if it's my all-time favorite song, but I really like "Terra's Theme." As soon as that track hit in the opening moments of Final Fantasy VI, I knew I was in for something truly special.

CHRIS HOFFMAN

This is tough. I kinda wanna say "Epitaph," the sad version of the airship theme from FFVI, but I also really like "Dancing Mad," FFVI's final boss song. Or maybe something from FFVII or VIII...?

CODY MARTIN

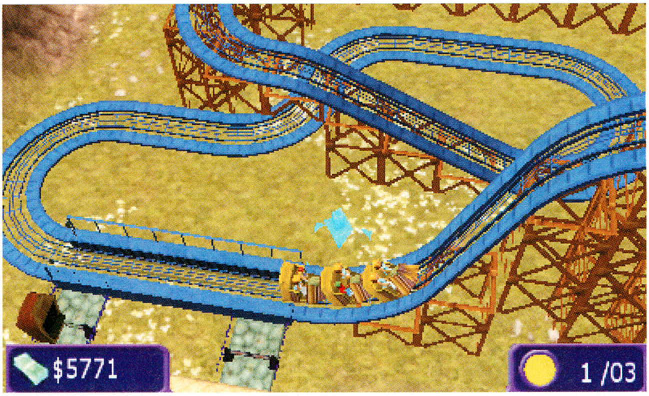
The song that plays throughout the Macalania Woods, "Silence Before the Storm," is a beautifully orchestrated piece from Final Fantasy X.

PHIL THEOBALD

I've never been into Final Fantasy (yeah, I'm *that* guy), so I'm going to cheat and say "To Make the End of Battle" from Ys Book I & II on the Wii Virtual Console.

STEVE THOMASON

If you had asked me a few days ago, I probably would have said FFX's "Zanarkand." But Theatrhythm reminded me how much I love "Behind the Door" from FFIX.



A Bumpy Ride

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3D

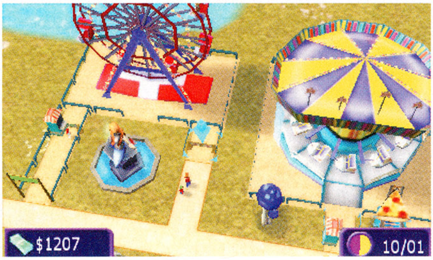
5.5

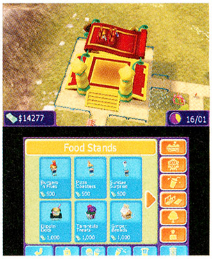
After an eight-year hiatus, RollerCoaster Tycoon returns—and the theme park-building series is making its handheld debut. As per the franchise's emphasis on designing roller coasters, RollerCoaster Tycoon 3D has you building plenty of them in its Coaster Story mode, in which you help tycoons revitalize their parks by raising money and attracting guests. These missions are often simple, but they're decently paced and challenge your coaster-constructing skills. It's also fun to experiment with the game's expansive selection of coaster types to see what you can create. You can build and save up to nine rides using the separate Coaster Creator mode, and pull from your creations later to fulfill Coaster Story mission objectives.

Disappointingly, this game suffers from some unfortunate flaws. Part of the fun of previous RollerCoaster Tycoon titles is in filling amusement parks with attractions and spending hours perfecting them, but RollerCoaster Tycoon 3D's Park Sandbox mode is a huge letdown. You have unlimited funds and a massive plot of land to work with, but there's an awfully small limit on the number of rides, coaster parts, scenery pieces, shops, and footpaths that you can include in your park. This title also lacks details that gave previous iterations some of their charm, such as the option to check guest statuses or to name rides. Additionally, the game's cumbersome interface can make reconstructing sections of roller coasters a real pain. You can't even modify a coaster's track unless you delete each piece that follows the area you want to change.

Although RollerCoaster Tycoon 3D can be fun, its shortcomings prevent it from being the immersive experience the series is famous for. Fans might be excited to see the franchise return, but this portable simplification will leave most players feeling less than thrilled. —**CODY M.**

N3DS PUBLISHER: **ATARI**
DEVELOPER: **N-SPACE**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**





You might know **Joshua**.
He loves video games, and he owns enough to know they're not all meant for kids. That's why he reminds his friends (at least the ones that have kids) that they all have **big black letters on the box** to help parents find the ones that are best for their families.

You can learn about those ratings at **ESRB.org**

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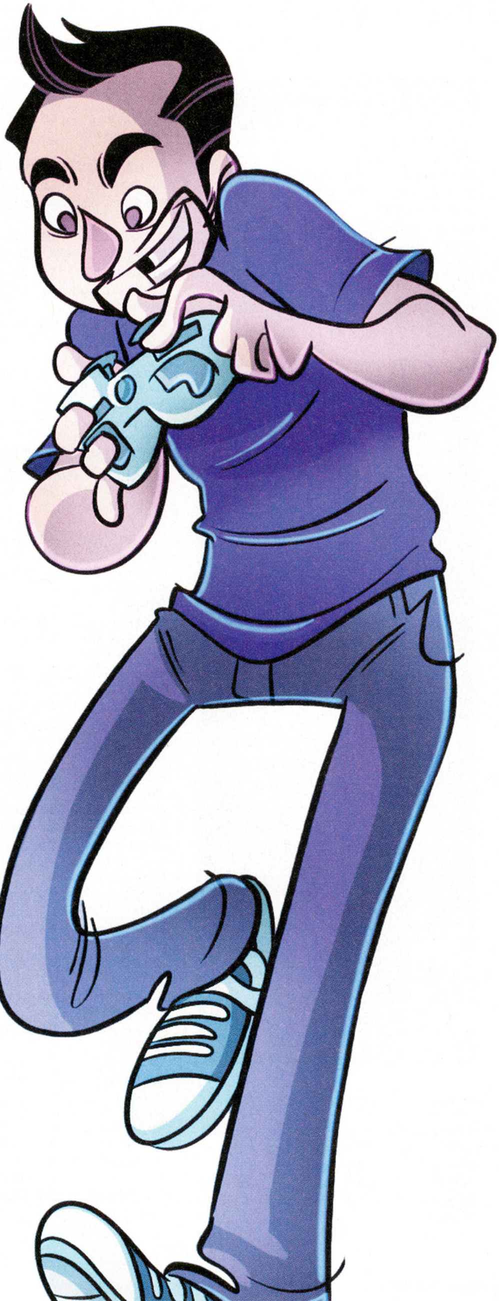


REVIEWS ARCHIVE

THE COMPLETE LIST OF NINTENDO POWER REVIEWS FROM THE PAST YEAR

SCORES REFLECT INDIVIDUAL REVIEWERS' OPINIONS

Nintendo 3DS

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
Ace Combat: Assault Horizon Legacy	7.5	Namco Bandai	273	T
Bit.Trip Saga	8.0	Aksys	271	E
BlazBlue: Continuum Shift II	8.5	Aksys	268	T
Captain America: Super Soldier	5.0	Sega	273	T
Cartoon Network Punch Time Explosion	7.0	Crave	267	E10+
Cave Story 3D	8.0	NIS America	273	E10+
Centipede: Infestation	6.5	Atari	273	E10+
Cooking Mama 4: Kitchen Magic	5.0	Majesco	273	E
Crush 3D	7.0	Sega	275	E10+
Cubic Ninja	4.0	Ubisoft	268	E
Dead or Alive Dimensions	9.0	Tecmo Koei	267	T
Deca Sports Extreme	5.0	Konami	271	E
Doctor Lautrec and the Forgotten Knights	6.5	Konami	272	E10+
Driver Renegade	3.0	Ubisoft	271	M
Dual Pen Sports	7.0	Namco Bandai	270	E10+
Face Racers: Photo Finish	4.0	Majesco	271	E
FIFA Soccer 12	7.0	EA Sports	272	E
Frogger 3D	6.5	Konami	271	E
Funky Barn 3D	6.0	Ubisoft	276	E
Gabrielle's Ghostly Groove 3D	5.5	Natsume	271	E
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	4.0	Warner Bros.	270	E10+
Harvest Moon: The Tale of Two Towns 3D	7.5	Natsume	272	E
James Noir's Hollywood Crimes	5.0	Ubisoft	273	T
Kid Icarus: Uprising	9.5	Nintendo	277	E10+
The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D	9.5	Nintendo	268	E10+
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7	7.0	Warner Bros.	274	E10+
Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games	7.0	Sega	275	E
Mario Kart 7	9.0	Nintendo	274	E
Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D	9.0	Konami	276	M
Michael Jackson: The Experience	5.0	Ubisoft	273	E10+
Nano Assault	7.0	Majesco	273	E10+
Nikoli's Pencil Puzzle	6.0	Konami	272	E
Order Up!!	6.5	UTV Ignition	275	E
Pac-Man & Galaga Dimensions	7.0	Namco Bandai	269	E10+
Pac-Man Party 3D	4.5	Namco Bandai	273	E
Pet Zombies	5.5	Majesco	272	T
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection 3D	7.0	Crave	268	E10+
Pokémon Rumble Blast	7.5	Nintendo	273	E
Rabbids Travel in Time 3D	6.5	Ubisoft	267	E
Reel Fishing Paradise 3D	6.0	Natsume	269	E
Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D	7.5	Capcom	269	M
Resident Evil: Revelations	9.0	Capcom	275	M
Shifting World	6.5	Aksys	277	E
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor Overclocked	9.0	Atlus	271	T
Shinobi	7.5	Sega	273	T
The Sims 3 Pets	7.5	Electronic Arts	273	T
Sonic Generations	8.0	Sega	274	E
Spider-Man: Edge of Time	6.0	Activision	273	T
Spirit Camera: The Cursed Memoir	7.0	Nintendo	277	T
SpongeBob SquigglePants	7.5	THQ	267	E
Star Fox 64 3D	8.0	Nintendo	271	E
Super Mario 3D Land	9.0	Nintendo	273	E
Tales of the Abyss	7.0	Namco Bandai	275	T
Tekken 3D Prime Edition	7.5	Namco Bandai	276	T
Tetris Axis	7.5	Nintendo	272	E
Thor: God of Thunder	6.0	Sega	272	T
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell 3D	5.5	Ubisoft	267	T
Transformers: Dark of the Moon–Stealth Force Edition	4.0	Activision	270	E10+
WWE All Stars	7.5	THQ	274	T

MORE ON:

KID ICARUS: UPRISING

Kid Icarus: Uprising is bursting at the seams with stuff to love: eye-popping graphics, an awesome story, laugh-out-loud moments, glorious fully orchestrated music, and a seemingly endless number of bonus modes and cool collectibles. But while Pit handles beautifully in the air, the ground controls are a bit clunky and never fully satisfy. Overall though, I'd recommend this game as strongly as any other Nintendo 3DS title.

—CHRIS S.

Wii

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
The Adventures of Tintin: The Game	5.5	Ubisoft	275	E10+
Back to the Future: The Game	6.5	Telltale	273	T
Bit.Trip Complete	9.0	Aksys	271	E
Captain America: Super Soldier	5.5	Sega	270	T
Cars 2: The Video Game	7.0	Disney	269	E10+
Cartoon Network Punch Time Explosion XL	6.0	Crave	274	E10+
Centipede: Infestation	6.5	Atari	273	E10+

MORE ON:

Wii FIT PLUS

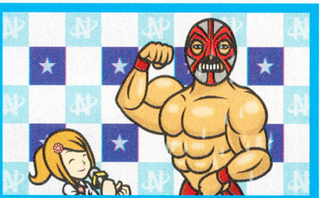
Working out might not cross your mind when you're wanting some game time, but Wii Fit Plus actually makes exercising into an enjoyable experience. The balancing and aerobics minigames are pretty fun for casual workouts, and there are some great resources on offer should you decide to begin a fitness routine.

—CODY M.

Disney Universe	4.5	Disney	273	E10+
Driver San Francisco	4.5	Ubisoft	271	T
Epic Mickey	8.5	Disney	263	E
FIFA Soccer 12	8.0	EA Sports	272	E
Fishing Resort	7.5	Xseed	273	E
Fortune Street	7.5	Nintendo	274	E
Go Vacation	7.0	Namco Bandai	273	E10+
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	4.0	Warner Bros.	270	E10+
Kirby's Return to Dream Land	8.5	Nintendo	272	E10+
Kung Fu Panda 2	2.5	THQ	268	E10+
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7	7.0	Warner Bros.	274	E10+
The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword	9.5	Nintendo	274	E10+
LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean: The Video Game	7.0	Disney	268	E10+
Lost In Shadow	8.0	Hudson	263	E10+
Madden NFL 12	7.0	Electronic Arts	271	E
Major League Baseball 2K12	2.5	2K Sports	277	E
Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games	7.0	Sega	273	E
Mario Party 9	8.0	Nintendo	276	E
Mario Sports Mix	8.0	Nintendo	264	E
Mystery Case Files: The Malgrave Incident	6.0	Nintendo	269	E
NASCAR 2011: The Game	3.0	Activision	269	E
PokéPark 2: Wonders Beyond	5.5	Nintendo	276	E
Rayman Origins	9.5	Ubisoft	273	E10+
Rhythm Heaven Fever	8.0	Nintendo	276	E
Rio	4.0	THQ	267	E
Rune Factory: Tides of Destiny	8.0	Natsume	272	E10+
Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure	7.0	Activision	273	E10+
Spider-Man: Edge of Time	7.0	Activision	273	T
Super Mario All-Stars	9.0	Nintendo	263	E
Thor: God of Thunder	5.5	Sega	267	T
Transformers: Dark of the Moon—Stealth Force Edition	3.0	Activision	270	E10+
TRON: Evolution—Battle Grids	6.5	Disney	263	E10+
Virtua Tennis 4	8.0	Sega	267	E
Wii Play: Motion	7.5	Nintendo	268	E10+
Worms: Battle Islands	7.0	THQ	264	E10+
WWE '12	6.5	THQ	274	T
X-Men Destiny	2.5	Activision	273	T
Xenoblade Chronicles	9.0	Nintendo	277	T

MORE ON:

RHYTHM HEAVEN FEVER



As a fan of both rhythm games and general weirdness, I loved the original Rhythm Heaven for Nintendo DS. So of course I was superpsyched to play Rhythm Heaven Fever on Wii. As I hoped, this sequel is a blast. The tunes are catchy, and the goofy scenarios are a joy to watch. My favorite stage? Although I love Air Rally's music, I can't get enough of Ringside's silliness. "Wubba-dubba-dubba is that true?" —PHIL T.

Nintendo DS

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
Aliens: Infestation	8.0	Sega	272	T
ATV Wild Ride	7.0	Destineer	264	E
Bejeweled 3	8.5	PopCap	274	E
Camping Mama: Outdoor Adventures	5.0	Majesco	271	E
Captain America: Super Soldier	3.5	Sega	270	E10+
de Blob 2	8.0	THQ	265	E
Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Revelation	7.5	Nintendo	265	T
Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker 2	7.5	Nintendo	271	E
Fossil Fighters: Champions	8.0	Nintendo	273	E
Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective	9.0	Capcom	263	T
Giana Sisters DS	9.0	Destineer	265	E
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	3.5	Warner Bros.	270	E10+
Harvest Moon: The Tale of Two Towns DS	8.0	Natsume	272	E
Kingdom Hearts Re:coded	8.0	Square Enix	263	E10+
Kirby Mass Attack	8.0	Nintendo	271	E
Kung Fu Panda 2	4.5	THQ	268	E10+
LEGO Battles: Ninjago	7.5	Warner Bros.	267	E
Naruto Shippuden: Shinobi Rumble	6.0	Tomy	264	T
Plants vs. Zombies	9.0	PopCap	264	E10+
Professor Layton and the Last Specter	8.5	Nintendo	272	E10+
Rio	5.5	THQ	267	E
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor 2	8.0	Atlus	276	T
Solatorobo: Red the Hunter	9.0	Xseed	271	E10+
Spider-Man: Edge of Time	5.0	Activision	273	E10+
Thor: God of Thunder	6.0	Sega	267	E10+
Transformers: Dark of the Moon—Autobots/Decepticons	3.0	Activision	270	E10+
TRON: Evolution	6.5	Disney	263	E10+
X-Men Destiny	2.0	Activision	273	E10+

MORE ON:

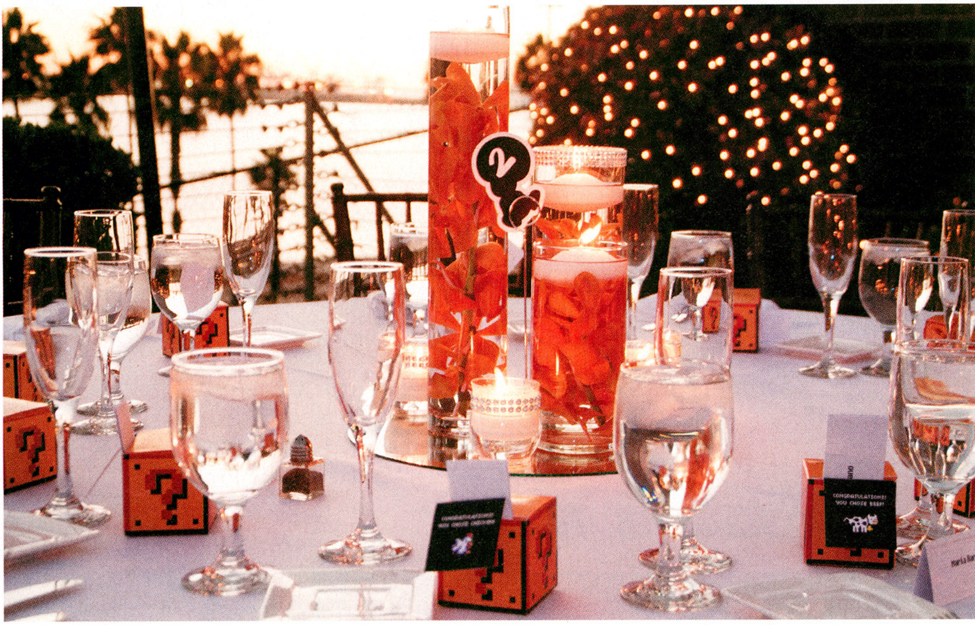
SOLATOROBO: RED THE HUNTER

Solatorobo could have easily been doomed to never hit North America, and that would have been a shame, because this action-RPG is packed with charming characters, impressive visuals, a surprisingly deep story, and fun grab-and-toss play mechanics. Though not especially difficult, the game has plenty of content—it's twice as long as it initially appears. Xseed took the risk by bringing this gem stateside; return the favor by giving Solatorobo a shot, especially now that it can be found at a discounted price. —CHRIS H.

Merchant

They've ripped up and carried off the entire warehouse with all of my stock in it!

COMMUNITY



FANDOM

Mario-Aided Matrimony

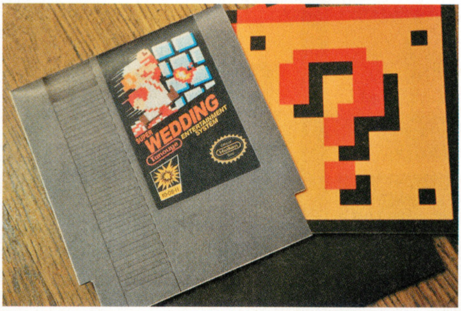
What better way to show your love (for classic NES games)?

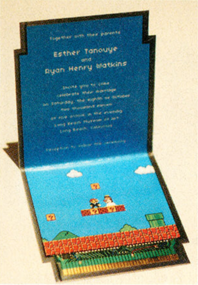
WEDDINGS ALLOW US to demonstrate our love and commitment to another person through ceremony, but they can also be opportunities to show off our creativity and our interests. Betrothed couple Esther and Ryan Watkins opted to show their affection for classic Super Mario Bros. games via cartridge-shaped invitations, retro-stylized wedding favors, and even a familiar entrance song.

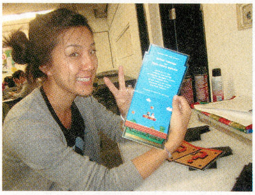
The two first met in 2008 after friends had tried setting them up for years, and their wedding took place last fall at the Long Beach Museum of Art in California. We're guessing their ceremony looked different from any other one held at the stunning oceanfront property. "I wanted to have a fun wedding that reflected our personalities," asserts Ryan. "Growing up, I had two older brothers who played a lot of Nintendo, so they were a huge influence on me. Super Mario Bros. was always my favorite game as a kid."

As a result, the pair decided to assemble a Mario-themed wedding. When Esther told her college friend, artist Larry Quach, about the plan, he helped construct these epic cartridge-inspired invitations, which closely resemble the plastic-and-metal NES originals but are created entirely from paper.

Using cartridge photos as the basis, Quach worked some magic with Adobe Photoshop to clean up and customize the images, adding faux icons like the "Official Watkins Seal" to really personalize the invites. And each one arrived in a black sleeve modeled after the familiar ones from the 8-bit era. "Larry's creativity is so unique," explains Esther. "He added so many specific details







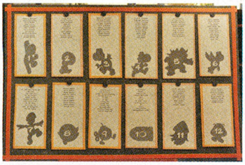
The amount of work that went into making this Mario-themed wedding is staggering, but the results speak for themselves.

to make the cartridge our own, and that was very special for the wedding."

Quach, on the other hand, cedes all credit to the original developers. "Super Mario has such a wealth of iconic and well-thought-out design," he says. "If anything, I should be crediting all of this to Shigeru Miyamoto." Hundreds of man-hours were spent between the trio and their friends assembling the invites, which required plenty of cutting and gluing to make everything perfect. "Our hands almost fell off," jokes Quach.

But the theme didn't end with these wonderful invites. The couple also utilized a Mario-tinged seating chart, complete with silhouettes of iconic series characters, as well as a Mario cake topper created by Long Beach bakery Sweet & Saucy Shop. On top of that, the bridal party entered to the theme song from Super Mario Bros. 3 and YouTube sensation "Mario Kart Love Song" played when they cut the cake. Even the guests got involved—Ryan's brother and sister-in-law dressed up his baby nephew as Mario!

Luckily, the weather behaved and the couple and their 125 guests were able to experience the ceremony outdoors, as intended. "It was a perfect evening," asserts Ryan. "It couldn't have been any better, and we had countless guests tell us it was one of the most fun and beautiful weddings they've attended." —**ANDREW H.**



TAKE *your best* SHOT

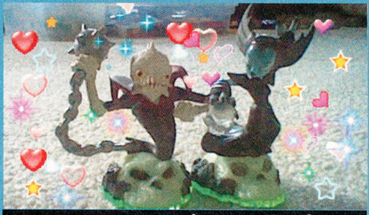
PHOTO CHALLENGE

SEND YOUR PICS TO **photos@nintendopower.com.**

Use your Nintendo DSi or Nintendo 3DS system to snap a fun, gaming-related photo that matches this month's theme, then transfer the image to a computer using an SD card reader and e-mail it to the above address. We'll print the best ones.

THIS MONTH'S THEME: SPRING (THE SEASON)

VOLUME 276'S THEME: VALENTINE'S DAY



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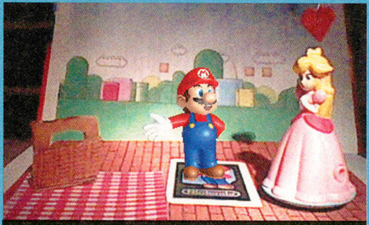
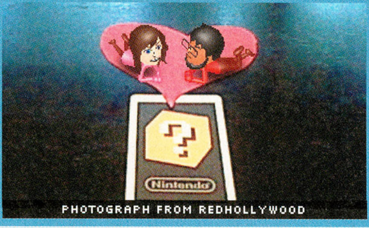


PHOTOGRAPH FROM DANIEL C.



PHOTOGRAPH FROM REDHOLLYWOOD

READERS UNDER THE AGE OF 18 MUST GET A PARENT'S PERMISSION TO SUBMIT A PHOTO.

ABOVE *and* BEYOND

Got art, cosplay, case mods, etc.? Send them to us via email to **community@nintendopower.com** or via snail mail to Nintendo Power/Community c/o Future US, 4000 Shoreline Court, STE 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. We'll print the best stuff!

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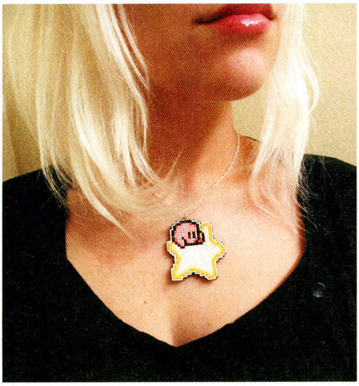
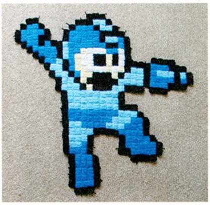


[Above] We can't wait to see the completed version of this piece.



FANDOM

Master Craftswoman

One woman's quest to craft every video game character imaginable

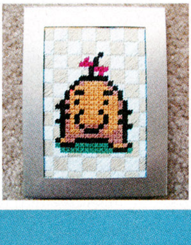
JESSIE ELLIOTT of Seattle, Washington, has been busy. She runs game-themed cross-stitch blog Pixel Stitches (pixelstitches.blogspot.com) to offer updates on the numerous projects she's working on, plus she's whipped up home decor, fridge magnets, and perler-bead re-creations of characters from at least 25 Nintendo games—and many more are on the way.

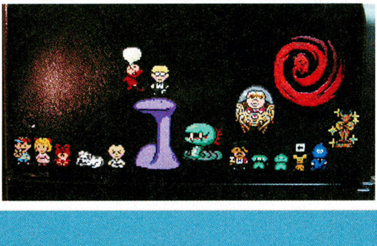
The first project of hers that caught our eye was her nearly two dozen EarthBound refrigerator magnets made out of mini Hama beads. "I'm really fond of the side characters from [EarthBound], so I have a lot of material to cover still!" exclaims Elliott, which explains why she hasn't yet made a Ness magnet but has made the mouse that helps you escape dungeons.

She digs deep into the Nintendo library for inspiration. One of her current projects is to make a cross-stitch of Zeke from the character-select screen in Zombies Ate My Neighbors—Jessie plans on making his comrade, Julie, as well so they can be reunited. "That game has just always been pure fun to me," remembers Elliott.

She's even dabbled in crocheting. "I have always wanted to get better at crocheting, and I figured a really simple way to practice would be to make squares I could sew together into a video-game character rug," she explains. That practice yielded an impressive 3'-by-3' rug of the Blue Bomber.

Lately Elliott has been turning out more necklaces than anything else. Her Kirby's Dream Land–influenced piece is a standout: Kirby is hugging a Warp Star, which was sewn using glow-in-the-dark thread. We didn't even know such an amazing material existed! In addition, Elliott often plays games with an eye toward noting the gems in them, and later turns those items into jewelry. "I love way too many video games, and that means that there's a lot of content for me to choose from," she gushes. —**DAVID W.**

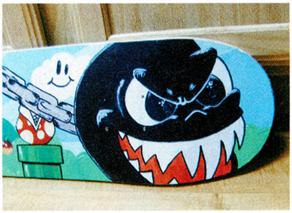




FANDOM

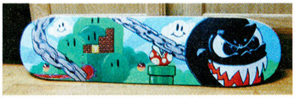
Chomping at the Board

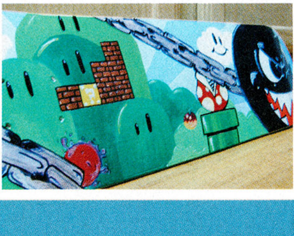
Pull an aerial on this deck, and you'll reveal one of Mario's hungriest foes.

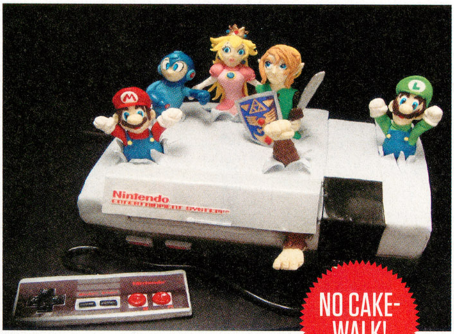


TEXAN ARTIST Jesse James admits he's "not exactly a huge Mario fan," but he could've fooled us: one of his latest pieces is a skateboard deck emblazoned with a gorgeous panorama of a Super Mario Bros.-inspired level, featuring a Chain Chomp about to feast on something just out of view. James completed the piece in less than a week and says he was moved to do it because of what "[Mario] represents: my youth, fun, the '80s, [and] good times with great friends."

What's most impressive about this board is that James did all the artwork by hand—there was nothing digital about the process at all. He bought a board from Walmart, removed the wheels and trucks, sanded off the old graphic, sketched a new one, and hand-painted over that sketch. The final moment of inspiration came when a friend told James the board "needed a pipe or something to make it distinctively Mario." —**DAVID W.**







NO CAKE-WALK!

FANDOM

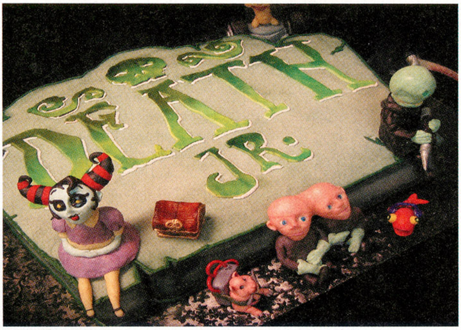
Ate-Bit Cake

One of the only surprises you'd want at a wedding

WHILE MOST WEDDINGS have an extravagant, multitiered wedding cake, sometimes a bride surprises her groom with a unique cake of his own, inspired by his interests. Case in point: the fully edible treat above that re-creates the classic Nintendo Entertainment System with a handful of iconic gaming heroes—including Mario, Mega Man, and Link—bursting from within the faux plastic.

Commissioned by a bride for her Nintendo-loving hubby-to-be, the cake was created by Debbie Goard, the 43-year-old owner of Debbie Does Cakes, an Oakland, California, studio known for its sculpted desserts. Goard, who has a background in art, has been designing cakes for 22 years, since taking over for a retiring cake decorator on a whim.

To match the likenesses of these myriad characters, Goard worked from online images. She effuses, "I was so excited to find entire wiki pages devoted to each of the games and their characters. I hadn't realized there was such a dedicated fan base." In addition to the NES cake, she has created cakes based on "practically every game system," as well as cakes for video game launch parties—like the one below for Konami's Death Jr. series. **—ANDREW H.**



FANDOM

Where High Fashion and Gaming Intersect

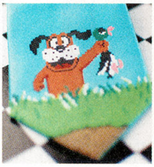
This fan makes incredibly detailed game-inspired ties and nail art.

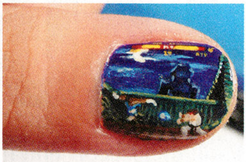
MAYA GARCÍA of Madrid, Spain, goes by the name Maya Pixelskaya as a pixel artist, which she happily reports is her full-time job. It started as a hobby when she was a teenager, stringing together hairpins to mimic the shape of an NES controller, and as she's grown up, so has her artistic output: she's gone from fiddling with hair accessories to keeping a steady hand as she carefully paints scenes from landmark NES and Super NES games onto fingernails and neck ties.

One of her most impressive—and, no doubt, challenging—works is a moment from a Street Fighter II round between Chun Li and Ryu. It's instantly recognizable, but remember: this was all painted onto a single fingernail.

"I used nail polish, which as female readers will know, is extremely sticky and unmanageable for mixing colors and making small details because it dries in a matter of seconds," she explains. In the course of a single afternoon, she re-created this amazing scene. "Chun Li's body position was hard because in that little blot of paint you have to be able to see her spinning bird kick. Also, the names [of the fighters]—that's probably the tiniest thing I've ever written."

The necktie designs are slightly bigger, but easily as impressive. Take it from Ron Gilbert, the man responsible for Monkey Island and Maniac Mansion, who asked Maya Pixelskaya to send him a Maniac Mansion tie. He was blown away and told her he loved the neckwear. It's clear to see why—the one tiny scene it depicts bursts with details, such as the cursor at the top of the tie, away from the action.

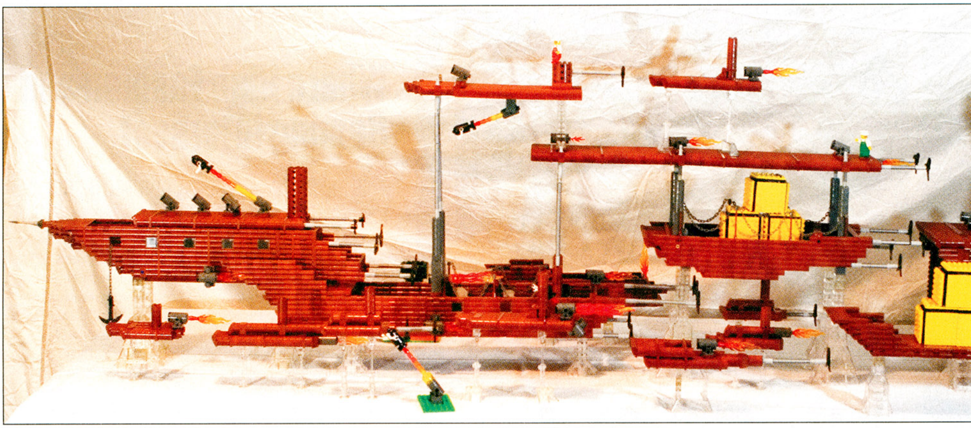




García says she doesn't do much prep work as far as preliminary drawings to execute these designs. "I barely draw a couple of lines and shapes to help me maintain proportion," she says. "I guess my eyes have become used to counting the pixels."

And it shows, especially in her Duck Hunt tie, which focuses on what she says has long been her favorite NES game. "I'm sure Duck Hunt appeared in many people's lives as it did in mine: as part of the two-game NES cartridge that contained it together with Super Mario Bros. I used to play it incessantly with my cousins, especially when we found out one of us could move the duck with the controller while the other tried to kill it with the Zapper."

Visit www.mayapixelskaya.com to see more of this artist's amazing work. **—DAVID W.**



FANDOM

LEGO Maniac

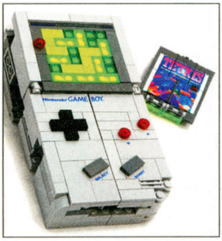
Nintendo, LEGO, and Transformers merge to form an artistic gestalt.

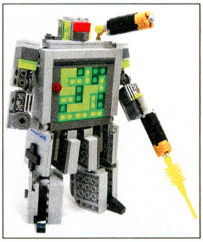
JULIUS VON BRUNK, a New York-based graphic designer and multimedia artist, has combined three of his childhood (and adulthood) passions to create artwork that's as much fun to play with as it is to look at. After receiving a used NES as a six-year-old, von Brunk, now 27, immediately became enamored with Nintendo. As he explains, "For me, Nintendo is like the Walt Disney of video game universes. It's got the content, value, quality, recognizable characters, and need I say... magic!" He is also a lifelong fan of LEGO bricks, even learning to spell the toy's name before his own. It didn't take much for him to combine these passions to create some pretty amazing sculptures.

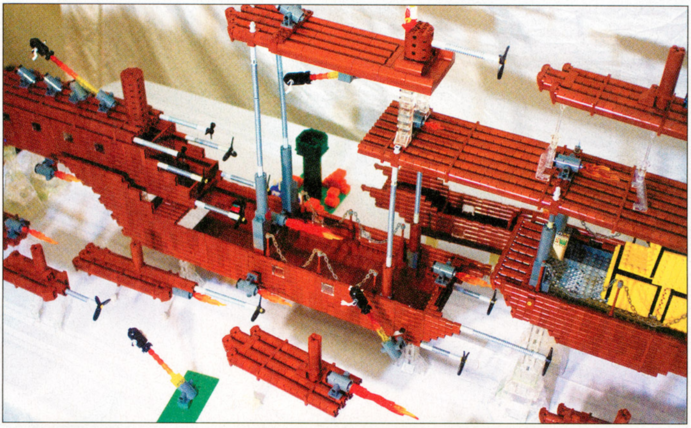
Von Brunk's most elaborate piece is The Fireflower, a six-foot-long re-creation of an airship from Super Mario Bros. 3 that's composed of over 8,000 bricks. The ship is chock-full of propellers, flamethrowers, and cannons (some of which can be seen firing Bullet Bills). A fleet of mini airships escorts The Fireflower to its destination, and the boss chamber toward the stern of the ship features a large mosaic of a Fire Flower (hence the ship's name) that glows thanks to a working light in the chamber's interior. As a hidden bonus, the walls of the boss chamber are decorated with sprites of Mario, a Goomba, a Piranha Plant, and more.

Von Brunk also has a healthy love for Transformers. He reminisces, "throughout my early childhood years, I'd try to slap together rickety LEGO versions of Optimus Prime or even the Autobot cassettes. When I was about 15 or 16 years old and my skills greatly improved, I'd make custom transforming robots from LEGOs that were vaguely inspired by actual characters." Those early skills have culminated in the creation of the heroic Nintendobots—a team of fully transformable robots that change into Nintendo-themed objects. The first is Plasmashock, who reminds us a bit of an orange, wingless Starscream. He converts into a life-sized NES Zapper accessory. He may not improve your Duck Hunt score, but he still looks mighty impressive. The most recent Nintendobots are Domaster and Tetrawing, who are styled after the Decepticons Soundwave and Laserbeak. Domaster changes from a robot into an original Game Boy system, and his weapons become a pair of AA batteries that store in his pack. The diminutive Tetrawing transforms from a robotic bird into a Tetris game cartridge that plugs into Domaster's Game Boy mode.

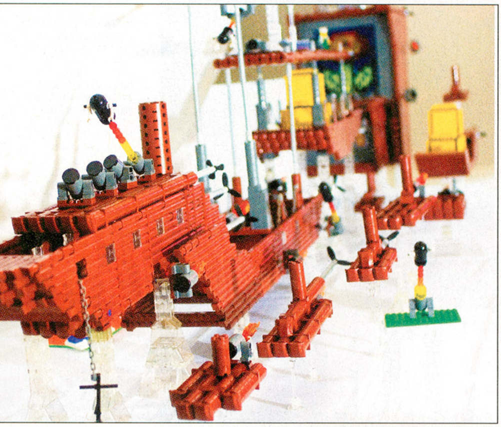
Once inspiration hits him, von Brunk checks online to see if anyone else has tackled that particular build. If there is an existing model, he takes that

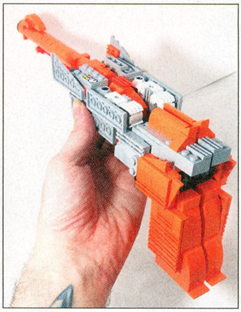


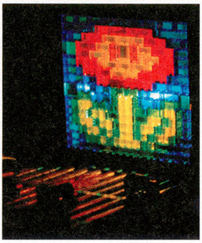




[Above] Like all of Bowser's warships, the Fireflower is armed with enough weaponry to take out an army. Only the studly Mario Brothers will be able to make it through. Studly. Like studs on a brick. That's a LEGO joke, folks.



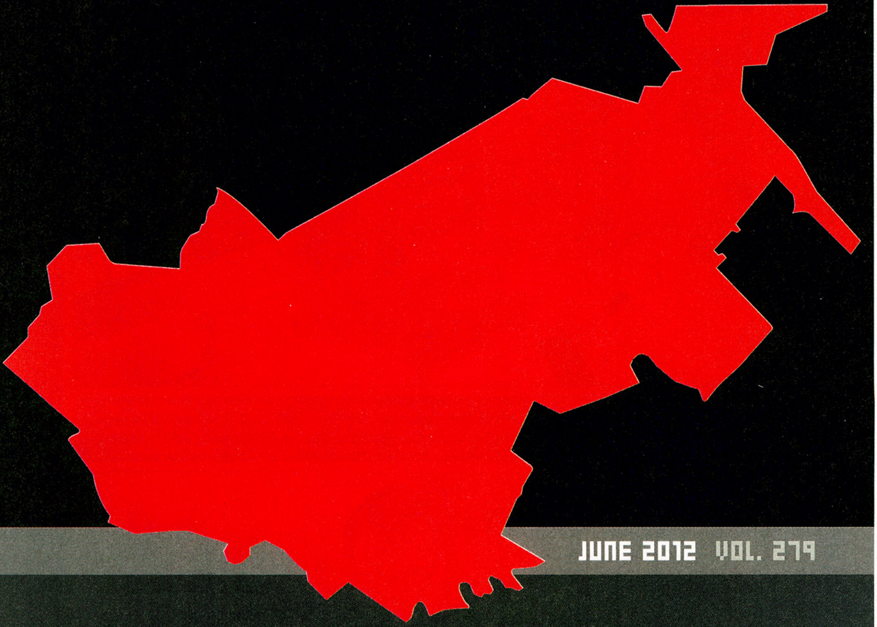




as a challenge to one-up the previous artist. He then uses a massive collection of LEGO bricks that he has amassed throughout his childhood and more recent purchases. When he finds himself in need of specific bricks (which is quite often), he tracks them down online. Von Brunk explains that waiting for blocks that he ordered is usually more time-consuming than the construction of the models, which can take anywhere from a few days to just a couple of hours. The transforming models require a bit of extra effort. As von Brunk says, "a builder must frequently switch the project back and forth between robot and alternate mode simultaneously in order to test its functions. I'll attach a few bricks or tiles in robot mode, then immediately I'll transform it to its other mode to see if the pieces would work—if they don't look right, or if they interfere with its transformation cycles, I have to remove what I just added and try to improvise."

In the future, von Brunk plans to complete a six-inch transparent ? Block from the Mario games that will light up just like the mosaic on The Fireflower. He also intends to create transforming rivals for the Nintendobots—based on accessories for the Sega Genesis. You can keep up on his latest projects by visiting his website at www.baronvonbrunk.com. —**PHIL T.**

PHOTOS: ROBOT MODELS: JULIUS VON BRUNK; AIRSHIP MODEL: ROZ SMITH; HEADSHOTS: TIM SYPASONG



JUNE 2012 VOL. 279

NEXT MONTH

As summer approaches, Nintendo Power will start to heat up with some exciting new revelations in the June issue, including a cover story for the generations. Don't miss it or you'll rue your fate, comrade.

NINTENDO POWER (ISSN 1041-9551) is published monthly except bi-monthly in January/February, by Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Phone: (650) 872-1642. Fax (650) 872-2207. Website: www.futureus.com. Periodicals postage paid in San Bruno, CA and at additional mailing offices. Newsstand distribution is handled by Time Warner Retail. Subscriptions: One year basic rate (12 issues): US: $19.95. Canada: US$27.95. Canadian orders must be prepaid. Canadian price includes postage and GST (GST #R128220688). PMA #40612608. Subscriptions do not include newsstand specials.

POSTMASTER: Send changes of address to: Nintendo Power, PO Box 5770, Harlan, IA 51593-1270. Standard Mail Enclosure in the following editions: None. Ride-Along Enclosure in the following editions: None. Returns: Pitney Bowes, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2, Canada. Future US, Inc. also publishes @ Gamer, Crochet Today!, Your Knitting Life, Mac|Life, Maximum PC, The Official Xbox Magazine, PlayStation: The Official Magazine, PC Gamer and Windows: The Official Magazine.

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